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HARLEQUINADE



HARLEQUINADE

A NOVEL

BY
HOLLOWAY HORN

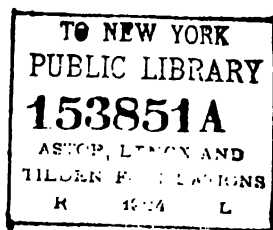
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BOOK I

HARLEQUINADE

CHAPTER ONE

MAURICE KENNEDY purchased the *Westminster Gazette* from the cripple outside Waterloo, leisurely entered the station, and caught the five-seventeen to Clapham Junction. Five evenings out of seven in each week he did the same, for, despite his comparatively few years, he was already a creature of habit, the vice which, complacent and insidious, destroys more souls than all the others together.

He was a Civil Servant, so that he was not wholly to blame.

Arrived at Clapham Junction—without exception the most abominable station in all the world—he walked home along Northcote Road, up to Wandsworth Common, and so to Mansfeld Road, wherein at number eighty-seven he lived.

He always went home that way . . .

The house was what romantic house-agents quaintly describe as double-fronted. A tiny garden faced the road and produced in due season geraniums, lobelia, and reluctant roses (Nature is almost as much a slave to habit as a Civil Servant). This garden was as unper-suadable as a mule, and for twenty years Maurice's father had steadily failed to achieve a certain pet desire of his, to wit, a synchronizing display of red, white, and blue flowers which should leave no doubt as to the thought, the *principle*, behind them.

Like his son, Mr. Kennedy was, in his unhorticultural moments, a Civil Servant, but unlike his son he was nothing else whatever. Save for the matter of balked floral achievement the office bounded his mental horizon. The persistent desire for a patriotic front garden tells all that it is necessary for one to know of him. His politics and religion were "sound." There was a mildness about him; he *looked* a Civil Servant.

Mrs. Kennedy welcomed her son on his arrival as she would presently welcome his father. She was a quiet-voiced lady with an intelligent face of matronly beauty. Maurice Kennedy was very like his mother, much more so than was Gwendoline his sister, the remaining member of the family.

Unlike most of the houses in the road, number eighty-seven had no name. Mr. Kennedy had been firm on the point. "Pretentious" was his invariable reply when Gwendoline suggested a name, and, as Mrs. Kennedy agreed with him, he was able to remain firm.

"Pretentious" was one of a family of words which is current in Mansfield Road (there are twenty thousand Mansfield Roads in London). "Irreligious," "Immoral," "Cheap," are of the family, and with these words (usually devoid of intelligent meaning when used in Mansfield Road) the Mr. Kennedys attempt to blast new ideas and happy fancies as they come along. The parent of the family, the Arch-Devastator, is the word "Respectable." Mr. Kennedy was in every way Respectable.

Maurice Kennedy, like his mother, had well-marked eyebrows, and the line of his jaw was good. He had strikingly dark blue eyes in one so fair as he. The mouth was large and humorous, far and away his best feature. Within a few months of twenty-one he had successfully negotiated the Civil Service Examination

for which his education had been specialized, and he had become an Assistant Auditor in a big Government Office in Whitehall. The years in which he had prepared for this exam. had, in the main, been happy, and if one person more than another had contributed to the happiness, it was Miss Henrietta Baverstock, whose cremated remains were reposing at Woking. She was a cousin of Mrs. Kennedy, who was the only relation she had in the world. Henrietta had "enjoyed," or, to be more exact, she had been in receipt of, an income of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum. At her death she left fifty pounds a year to each of her cousin's children, and the residue to a long list of very deserving but very dull charities connected with the Church as by Law Established, and sundry Homes for Lost Dogs.

Often in those years of adolescence, when otherwise he would have been wholly dependent on his father, Maurice remembered his second cousin's existence with gratitude. Miss Baverstock had made it quite clear in her will that Maurice (who was just eighteen at the time of her death) was to have immediate control of the income from his share of her investments.

The pound a week rendered many things possible. Maurice subscribed to a private library in St. John's Road, and was rendered independent of the big public library on Lavender Hill from which he had borrowed books in less affluent days despite the vigorous protests of his sister, who said that all books from Public Libraries *smelt*. He still went there for Poetry, which he read indiscriminately, although his father regarded this habit as "feminine." Only Mr. Kennedy knew why. With the exception of Tennyson and Shakespeare (whom, like the good Englishman he was, he had never read) he regarded all poets with suspicion.

These books of Poetry, even from the Public Library,

were strangely clean and Maurice wondered a little sometimes. It is an odd thought. Reputations of writers may be calculated by the amount of dirt on their books in a great public library. The more dirt, the greater the reputation. This, however, is a digression, but it is capable of expansion.

Even in his student days a rare and mild evening in town was possible, and in his eighteenth and nineteenth years he was a confirmed galleryite. He saw the Gilbert and Sullivan revivals; Martin Harvey was his favorite actor.

Occasionally he took his mother; his father did not go to theaters, but he was too afraid of being regarded as narrow-minded to "disapprove" openly.

Between mother and son there was a much greater sympathy than between any other two members of the Kennedy family. Mrs. Kennedy possessed a remarkably plastic mind and unlike most ladies of her age (particularly in Mansfield Road) she was tolerant. This was due mainly to the experiments in Religion, to which subject she had devoted a considerable amount of thought and reading. In a subtle way it was Romance in her life.

Maurice had been about ten when his mother developed her first Big Enthusiasm. Mrs. Kennedy adopted the view that the Church of England should take a much greater part in Social Work than it did, and she promptly joined this league and that; within a few weeks she was attending "conferences." Curates of the more serious sort were cultivated and occasionally appeared at tea in Mansfield Road, where the Oxford manner awed Mr. Kennedy. Later a Church of England Socialist Party was discovered, and promptly joined by Mrs. Kennedy, to the ill-disguised horror of her husband. He dared not interfere, lest she did worse, which shows

that whatever else he lacked he had a certain knowledge of his wife. At the end of two years, however, Mrs. Kennedy ceased to attend Conferences and allowed her subscriptions to the various leagues to lapse.

For awhile her religious impulses were dormant although it was known in the family that she regarded the National Church as "unsatisfactory." The delicacy of Mr. Kennedy's position in his family circle (he was a sidesman, and in his own mind meant to be a churchwarden) during this "unsatisfactory" period can be imagined. He was intensely annoyed when his wife suddenly stopped attending the church.

It was Sunday evening; her domestic duties rarely allowed her to go in the morning, as she profoundly distrusted every maid she had ever had. Six o'clock came and Mr. Kennedy and his daughter commenced their preparations for church. Mrs. Kennedy continued her reading.

At ten minutes past Mr. Kennedy looked into the drawing-room.

"Ten minutes past, my dear!" he said, a little nervously.

"I'm not going to church to-night, John," she said, glancing up at him with the bland innocence in her blue eyes he had never really understood.

He raised his eyebrows, but under her steady gaze he said nothing. Very quietly he closed the door and then, thoughtfully, he went to church.

Nothing was said during the week of the omission, but on the following Sunday the same performance took place, and henceforward it was understood that Mrs. Kennedy did not go to church. It was a grave blow to her husband, but, as he knew, on questions of principle she was adamant.

In an indiscreet moment he confided his trouble to the

Senior Curate, the Rev. James Jolyon Molyneux. The Rev. James—a member of the muscular school of curates—gave the matter considerable thought. He knew of old that Mrs. Kennedy was a lady who required careful handling; he retained very mixed memories of the days when she had urged him to “do” things and had argued with him about Socialism.

The reverend gentleman had to do something now, but a week or so elapsed before he called at Eighty-seven.

“The Kurit!” Sarah (the maid) announced to Mrs. Kennedy, who was alone.

What happened is uncertain: it was a perfectly friendly encounter and the Rev. James stayed to tea.

“I’m quite, *quite* certain you’re wrong,” he said at the parting. “And,” he added, “I’m more sorry than I can say. If ever I can be of the slightest use to you, Mrs. Kennedy. . . .”

“Yes, I know, Mr. Molyneux,” she smiled gently as she spoke, and he quailed before the smile.

He took the memory of her unapprehended smile with him down the road and into his rooms. He thought a great deal about it. . . . Afterwards, talking it over with his Vicar, he said, “It was a kind of disarming smile . . . completely spoilt one’s argument . . . like Mona Lisa’s smile. It would be simply impossible to argue on important matters with Mona Lisa if she smiled as da Vinci made her.”

“Oh, quite!” said the Vicar. “Quite.”

Some months later Mrs. Kennedy commenced to talk of “Transmigration of Souls.” Whenever she did so, Mr. Kennedy immediately became absorbed in the *Globe*, which was his evening paper. She quoted Mrs. Besant.

“A remarkable woman, John,” she added. Once his

impatience betrayed him. "Irreligious," he snapped. "Irreligious!"

"What nonsense, my dear John," his wife replied with some heat. "Every one who steps outside your own narrow rut becomes, in your mind, irreligious. Apparently you regard me as irreligious, too?"

"My dear Margaret," he began wearily, "when I reach home from my work I'm too tired to commence a religious discussion. One looks for peace in one's home. . . ." The latter touch was intended as a reproach.

"And you get it, John," she said, with a quiet certainty. "But this obsession, this exclusive desire for what you call 'Peace,' can become very mechanical and deadly."

"No amount of thought, of argument, alters Truth," he said. "No argument is necessary if one has Faith."

"Even if one has Faith, as you call it, one should still think!" she said wickedly, but immediately was sorry, for an odd affection existed between them. "There, John, we won't argue any more," she added, maternally.

Theosophy was inevitable.

There were other leagues and societies and courses of lectures. More books and pamphlets appeared at Eighty-seven. Frequently they were missing, and usually Mrs. Kennedy's hue and cry did not succeed in finding them. It was never *proved* that Mr. Kennedy abstracted them, but it is certain that he hated to see them lying about. In his own mind he had summed up the whole School of Theosophy as "Blasphemous." Unswervingly he continued in the faith which he had received as a child, and this steadiness (in contrast to his wife's wobbling from one religion to another) proved to him that he was right. "Settled and mature convictions" was a favorite phrase of his.

Gradually, as compromise was necessary, it became

understood at Eighty-seven that religion was not discussed at table. Politics in a mild form possibly, but not religion. "There are some things, Maurice," Mr. Kennedy once said rebukingly to his son, "which should not be bandied about in idle conversation."

The son and daughter treated their parents with an odd seriousness which was called, in Mr. Kennedy's vocabulary, Respect. In some senses it was respect, for no matter how Mrs. Kennedy gyrated mentally she was the type of woman who commands deference from those around her. However wrong her views were she could very easily defend them, and no matter how dull Mr. Kennedy seemed when compared with his wife, the fact remained that judged by Mansfeld Road he had functioned admirably as a father.

He had "started" his family well . . . the best education the locality provided, good clothes, food, and so on, and this, together with a certain nervousness about their moral welfare—the expression of which had for years been tempered by the peculiar views of his wife—constituted the prevailing local conception of a father's duty.

The atmosphere of the home made by the union of these two people was an odd and varying compound. Most modern movements were at one time or another, and more or less clearly, reflected into it by the mother, whilst the father exerted a steadily static influence. On the question of Sunday observance, for example, the parents were usually at utter variance, although Mrs. Kennedy's tolerance of her children's wishes varied with her prevailing beliefs. For a few months whilst she was earnestly evangelical she joined forces with her husband, and the gramophone was banned. Music became "secular" and "religious."

Both Gwendoline and Maurice played, the latter very

pleasingly, on occasion, and quite early they learned to look upon their father's religious irruptions into music as an intolerable nuisance. Maurice, particularly, developed a clever method whereby he could switch almost imperceptibly from anything he was playing on to a hymn tune whenever his father entered the room on Sunday. Mr. Kennedy would stand with his hands under the tails of his morning coat, leaning a little forward from the hips, and having satisfied himself that the music Maurice was making was not such as warred with his principles, he would leave the young people to themselves. Once the door was closed Maurice would imperceptibly glide back to the tune he had been previously playing. No one smiled; it was taken for granted, and the innocent deception was an instance of the affection which existed in the Kennedy family. Occasionally Mrs. Kennedy would be in the room when her husband was thus deceived.

"I think you might consult your father's wishes a little more, Maurice," she would say.

"But I did, Mater. I played 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains,' all the time he was in the room. He can't hear now. And you know that you agreed that music is good or bad, not secular or religious."

"Yes . . . but. . . ."

And if it were wholly impossible to defend her husband's point of view (as it very often was) Mrs. Kennedy would sigh and go on with the book she was reading.

In this atmosphere of compromise Maurice Kennedy had been brought up. The whole of his boyhood, the period in which the human mind is at its highest receptive capacity, had been spent in it. It had environed the dreams of his adolescence, and through all his life it would be interwoven with his memories.

Mrs. Kennedy's greatest gift to her son had been her spirit of adventure, the desire to experiment. With her this insurgent spirit was conditioned by her sex and her responsibilities. With her son there was the sheet-anchor of the Civil Service. Not that Maurice Kennedy's work was monotonous or irresponsible. But he was a Civil Servant. He was settled in life. He might not roam except at the sacrifice of his position, which had taken six years of his life to obtain. Adventure entailed greater sacrifice on his part than on another's. His job was secure; he knew that he would be in it at a steadily increasing salary when he was thirty, and forty. . . . It was certain as Death.

And yet in him was this spirit of his mother and of his race. Sometimes there were quiet hours in the moonlight, on one or other of the Commons around, when he rebelled, when he cursed the office and the day he first entered through its massive doors.

But always in the morning he had caught the nine twenty-one with his father.

CHAPTER TWO

DURING the Church Socialist days Mrs. Kennedy had met a young man named Max Bateman and imagining him to be lonely she had invited him to Eighty-seven. The quaintness of the household had amused him and he continued to visit it with more or less frequency. After a period of suspicion in Maurice Kennedy, who was two years Bateman's junior, a friendship had sprung up between the two young men.

There was a suggestion of mystery about Bateman which was rather fascinating to the Kennedys, whose friends were usually very obvious. He was very reserved about himself and never spoke of his family; as far as the Kennedys knew he had not a relation in the world. Mrs. Kennedy had heard stories in the Society where she had first met him, stories of a varying nature because even there no one had any definite knowledge of him. He had no profession and save for articles he contributed to various "advanced" journals—far too "advanced" in the main to make any payment to those who wrote for them—he did no work. He appeared, nevertheless, to be in possession of considerable private means, and during his recurrent and curious disappearances letters came to Kennedy from Paris, Madrid, and even more remote places.

He was obviously a man of considerable education, and in moments of annoyance he had a *manner*. He was thin and dark, with the fine eyes of a dreamer, eyes in which one could easily imagine the fires of the fanatic lurking.

He was an uncompromising Socialist, and on nearly all questions his views were very unconventional, and expressed without reservation. He was the only person who ever succeeded in awing Horace Reginald Allgrove, the young gentleman who was affianced to Gwendoline Kennedy.

Reggy—by which deplorable name he was known at Mansfield Road—had visited the Kennedys as a prospective son-in-law perhaps half-a-dozen times when he met Bateman. It was Sunday afternoon, and Bateman, who was speaking at the Morris Hall in Clapham on Sunday evening, had looked in for tea.

He was much more silent than usual and was watching Reggy with unaffected interest. The fiancé was in his element at tea; he was as facile as the proverbial Curate. He had quite an amusing gift of small talk and apparently could turn it on when necessary as if it were a tap; theaters, polite scandal, and the like trivialities. He was "in" his father's office, and his father was "in" the wholesale vegetable trade. A very desirable young man indeed from many points of view, but with a maddening habit of referring to "we business men" and talking airily of Red Tape. His views on life were mainly derived from *John Bull* and the *Daily Mail*.

But at tea on Sunday he shone.

The only other guest that Sunday afternoon was Sophie Heatherly, a girl who had been at school with Kennedy's sister. She was a pretty little brunette with intelligent, sparkling eyes; she said very little.

"We came over the Common this afternoon," said Reggy. "A dozen of the orators were spouting for all they were worth. Oughtn't to be allowed. Sandwich, Sophie?" A slight lull in the conversation had called forth this remark.

"I've always said that the police should interfere," this was Mr. Kennedy's contribution.

"Agitators," went on Reggie. "Simply stirring up the people. Making them dissatisfied." He bit a small cake he held, and one imagined he would like to do the same with the agitators.

"I very nearly spoke on the Common myself this afternoon," said Bateman. There was no trace of annoyance in his words and he went on casually sipping his tea.

A hush followed.

"Mr. Bateman is a well-known speaker on political subjects," said Mrs. Kennedy. "It's odd how opinions differ, don't you think?" She had meant to change the subject, but her intention was lost on Reggie.

"You're not a *Socialist*?" he asked with ill-concealed horror.

"I am," said the uncompromising Bateman. "And I see you are a Conservative and an Imperialist."

Reggy was slightly taken back, but he recovered.

"I am," he said. "And proud of it, too."

"Naturally," said Bateman. "One would hardly subscribe to a definite school of thought without being proud of it."

"Are you *proud* of being a Socialist?" There was genuine amazement in the question, tinctured with caution, since Bateman's quiet voice was ominous. Reggy had no intention at all of being offensive.

"Quite," Bateman replied. To this no reply was possible even from Reggy.

The contrast between Bateman and Reggy was striking, and afterwards in the quietness of her own room even Gwendoline's conventional little mind—she was her father's daughter—was perturbed. Bateman was in-

tensely individual, quietly sure of himself. He was so obviously a gentleman, "in spite" (as Gwendoline thought) of his opinions, which clearly were not those of a gentleman, and of his nasty habit of speaking to common people on Sunday evenings. Reggy—unconscious youth—was hopelessly unindividual. His clothes, from the carefully chosen tie to the impeccable creases in his smart trousers, were such as a quarter of a million other young gentlemen in a thousand Mansfield Roads had worn that Sunday afternoon. His mind, his silly little mustache, his reading, his opinions might have been interchanged with any of the thousands of his type without any harm (or good) resulting. Gwendoline alone in her little white bedroom (with its silver toilet articles, and pictures chastely framed like many such another virgin and suburban bedroom) had an uneasy feeling that Reggy was not quite so dazzling as she had imagined when she compared him with the Agitator. She would have hated Reggy to wear the impossible hat or tie which Bateman wore, but still. . . . How often that "But still" has intruded into white virgins' bedrooms! And will.

Bateman went almost as soon as tea was over and Maurice Kennedy walked homeward with Sophie Heatherly. In a way he was fond of Sophie. They had grown up together, had been members of the same tennis club, had been thrown together at parties at each other's houses. It had been a case of *Habit* at its deadliest. Mr. Heatherly was a stalwart of the same church as Mr. Kennedy, and between the two "things" were vaguely understood. Gwendoline was enthusiastic about the match and subjected her brother to a kind of ragging intimidation. Occasionally he would take Sophie to a theater or on the river, and at the time of his sister's betrothal it was expected by most people who knew them

that the engagement between Sophie and Kennedy would very soon be announced.

No one expected it more definitely than Sophie. Kennedy had always found that she was a most agreeable girl, who listened (or at least appeared to listen, which answers the same purpose), with considerable intelligence to what a man had to say. She was a pretty little girl with soft eyes and hair, and she spoke of the sunset through the trees on Wandsworth Common with nice appreciation of its beauty. She loved color; didn't he? He did. That reminded him of a painter he had met once at one of the meetings on Clapham Common, a wild kind of fellow, and of several anecdotes about him, anecdotes discreetly edited for Sophie's ears. They were very successful, those little anecdotes, and spurred by her gentle appreciative laughter (clever little Sophie!) he went on talking.

He had the gift, so she assured him, of putting the human side of a person to her. He threw a new light on things. Sophie was one of those dangerous girls to whom it is fatally easy to talk, and a young man's tongue was assuredly given to him for his undoing.

Kennedy walked over the Common before he returned home. He knew as well as the others that he was linked with Sophie and that "one of these days" he would have to do something in the matter. He rather resented the way things had grown, had accumulated, and, man-like, he blamed himself for it. There was no doubt that he was quite fond of Sophie, that she was a jolly little girl, and that a man could talk to her, and thoroughly enjoy the talking. This last was a very great attraction indeed, but, in spite of it, he could not see why the families, and the family friends, should have butted into his affairs and brought things to a head.

It was as if the families were poultices.

Anyway there was plenty of time.

And then his thoughts went back to Max Bateman, who at the moment was probably talking to a room full of Socialists and Cranks at the Morris Hall. It was a queer hobby he thought.

He found his mother alone when he arrived home.

"Rather exciting at tea, Mater," he said.

She smiled.

"You took Sophie home?"

"Yes, Mater."

"I don't want to interfere with what doesn't concern me, Maurice, but I think you ought to be very careful with Sophie. She's very nearly in love with you."

"Oh, I don't think so," he said lightly.

"I do. I'm sure of it. You ought to think things over, Maurice, carefully. You know that by the code which exists about here you are expected to marry her. I'm putting it quite bluntly and crudely."

"But why?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "You take her about, you visit her home, and so on. It seems to be generally understood all round. As I said, you must think it over. You are old enough to understand the power of these people. You should certainly be very careful. I've been on the point of speaking to you before, but you know how I hate interfering. A word to the wise. . . ."

CHAPTER THREE

ONE of these days" came rather more quickly than Kennedy had anticipated.

The occasion was a "musical evening" at Sophie Heatherly's. She had invited Maurice and his sister and Reggy, and, as he had done on a dozen previous occasions, Maurice went. This time, however, he had hesitated.

He was an early arrival and Mrs. Heatherly greeted him affably. She called him "Dear Maurice." Sophie was not yet down and for awhile Maurice talked to her mother, whose conversation, whenever she and Kennedy were alone, was usually limited to Sophie: Sophie's music, Sophie's voice, and Sophie's sterling qualities generally.

"You see, Maurice, she's our only chick and, naturally, we're very proud of her." She smiled embracingly.

"Naturally, Mrs. Heatherly," Maurice acquiesced, also with a smile.

Sophie came in.

She was dressed in a little mauve frock which showed her white arms and neck. She was very pretty.

"So you *have* come, Maurice!" she said laughingly, as if there had been a doubt.

"Rather!" he said. "You're looking top-hole to-night, Sophie."

She curtsied mockingly, flashing up a pleased glance at him.

Two young ladies and their attendant young gentlemen entered at the moment. Kennedy was introduced

and the conversation became general and a little self-conscious. Sophie bridged over the awkward minutes, however, and Kennedy admired the deft way she kept things going.

Presently Gwen and Reggy arrived. Reggy greeted him with his usual affability. "Hallo, my bonnie bureaucrat!" A cheery, breezy affability which demonstrated how very much Reggy was at his ease.

Followed music from sundry people.

Gwen sang prettily, as did Sophie herself. Kennedy had always liked her voice; he told Gwen so and a knowing smile flitted over his sister's face.

After music came a meal. Not a dinner . . . there were no joints or anything heavy, but comestibles, light and seemly at an evening devoted to music, the lightest of the arts; sandwiches, lobster patties, eclairs, little cakes, and the like. The ladies withdrew in the approved style when the sandwiches and relevant dishes had come to their appointed end, and in the ten minutes which followed, Mr. Heatherly assumed control of affairs. He was a florid little man with a protuberant waistcoat and a nose the color of which "dyspepsia" had deepened. An affable little man who called Maurice "Old Chap" and told him mildly improper stories. The musical evening bored him unutterably, but he did his duty manfully when the women-folk withdrew.

It transpired that in the adjoining room—"Dad's Study" Sophie called it—were decanters and glasses and so on. He indicated the fact with a jerk of his head and thumb, and several of the young "fellers"—as he called them—trooped after him. He proceeded with the usual ritual and drank to their "Very good health." He drank a second time to no health in particular excepting it were his own. "The young fellers" then returned to the original room, leaving Mr. Heatherly, with

an air of duty well and nobly done, to the seclusion of his study and—it was an unkind thought although it occurred to several of the young “fellers”—the decanters.

Followed still more music of a cheerier kind than that which had preceded the sandwiches. One young feller, greatly daring, sang a comic song and another still more desperate youth suggested “Games.”

They were mostly tired of music and “games” was endorsed all round.

In the course of one of the games it fell to Kennedy’s lot to kiss Sophie Heatherly in the darkened hall. He was not anxious to kiss any one, but he had to demand that some one should undergo the operation—the game insisted on that—and he nominated Sophie. She was easy to kiss; some girls are awkward at such times. She came out and closed the door behind her, shutting in the laughing voices. She stood waiting just within the hall. In the half light she certainly looked very jolly.

Kennedy put his arm round her rather gingerly and kissed her.

“That’s a poor little kiss,” she said complacently, after she had submitted to it.

He laughed and kissed her again.

“That’s better!” she said, and then she raised her lips to his and kissed him full in the mouth. The kiss startled him. There was something in it which he had never associated with Sophie Heatherly, something which opened floodgates in his mind, and which made him think.

Sophie appeared not to have lost her composure at all, despite the wild things which might have been in her kiss, and she stood watching him with a quiet smile on her face, a quiet smile which left him wondering.

“You’d better go in, Maurice,” she said, at last.

"Oh . . . yes, of course," he said, gathering his momentarily scattered wits. "Of course I must."

The game went on. Sophie demanded Reggy. Kennedy knew that if she kissed him—and presumably she would for the game was an orgy of kissing—the kiss would be a very different one.

At the end of the evening Mr. Heatherly nodded again towards the study, but the "young fellers" did not respond to his hospitality. It didn't worry Mr. Heatherly.

Kennedy walked home with his sister and Reggy. On the way she talked expectantly of Sophie, but her brother said nothing. He left the two to make their adieux in the darkened hall and went upstairs at once.

It dawned on him that he was in a most awkward position.

He knew what had been behind Sophie's kiss, and he knew even more clearly that it awakened no response in him, that it left him cold. Clearly he did not love Sophie Heatherly, and yet by merely letting things drift he had allowed the two families to look upon the whole affair as settled. He had allowed Sophie to become a habit. . . .

He viewed his conduct in retrospect and he saw that in the opinion of most people who knew them he would be a cad if he did not ask Sophie to marry him. Somehow—when on earth had it started?—he had grown into the habit of kissing her when they parted. He whistled quietly as he reviewed the past months. What an ass he had been!

And he knew that when he asked her to marry him she would do so. Her kiss told him that, even if his mother had not done so.

He visualized her father and his walking home from church together as they usually did. . . .

He remembered the intimate way in which Mrs. Heatherly had talked of her daughter.

Everything seemed to be closing in on him.

The next evening he talked it over with his mother, and to his intense relief he found that she appreciated his point of view.

"I'm not surprised, Maurice. You've been careless, abominably careless, and naturally Sophie has assumed that you were fond of her."

"So I am!"

"Yes—yes. But she assumed that your intentions were definite. I did, too. So has every one else. You know the absurd way people go on. Why ever weren't you more careful?"

"I just didn't think," he said miserably. "I didn't notice where things were taking me to."

"Well, what are you going to do?" Mrs. Kennedy asked.

"There appears to be only one thing," he said. "I'd better become engaged."

"You don't seem enthusiastic, Maurice!"

"I'm not, Mater. She's a jolly little girl, but that's all, as far as I'm concerned."

"Frankly, you don't love Sophie?" She saw that it was so, and then went on. "It would be wrong of you to marry her. Quite wrong."

"But I'm in such a . . . such a . . ."

"Yes, I know, Maurice, but none the less you'd better face it. You must see Sophie, even though you have said nothing to her. You've let things drift so appallingly that you've succeeded in making every one regard you and she as practically engaged."

"I'll see her to-morrow," he said.

The interview was like plunging into running water on a very cold morning. He nerved himself to the

plunge; afterwards it wasn't so bad. Sophie was . . . dignified, and there were no tears. They parted in ~~the~~ little hall where they had parted so often. She stood for a moment her hand in his, her eyes on his reluctant eyes. Her dignity was not so enveloping as it had been.

"Good-by, Maurice," she said. "I shall always be glad we've been . . . friends."

"So shall I," he said. "Sophie, if . . ."

She interrupted him with a quiet little smile.

"I know," she said. "Really, I do understand . . . Maurice."

She opened the door but he remained standing awkwardly. Something in Sophie cut him to the heart. He wasn't certain what it was.

Suddenly the cold dignity melted away; her arms were round his neck. She kissed him passionately and then a second later, again.

She slipped away from him a little way back into the hall.

"Now go!" she said.

The softly closing door shut in his first love . . . if love it had been.

For moments there was a wild desire in him to turn and tell her he was wrong, that he loved her. He was filled with a sorrow that was almost a self-loathing . . . the poignancy in her dark eyes hurt him. Habit is sufficiently powerful even to simulate love.

Very slowly he turned away, and walked down the silent street. His lips were still tingling with the fervor of her kiss.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE sudden breaking off of the vague relations which had existed between Sophie and Kennedy caused great perturbation in their respective families. Gwendoline said frankly that her brother was a cad, and refused for awhile to speak to him, even to recognize his existence. His mother said nothing. His father kept on saying: Laxity of Principles; Trifling with a Young Girl's Affections. He was pained, indignant; surprised that a son of his, and so on; in short, characteristically incapable of understanding any point of view but his own.

The atmosphere became heavier and heavier.

Mr. Kennedy, emboldened by his wife's silence, openly blamed Bateman for Maurice's lack of "Principles." He went so far as to call Bateman a "Godless Anarchist," which description Mrs. Kennedy corrected with tartness.

It was the mother who suggested the great change.

"Your father is retiring quite soon, Maurice, and we have decided, as you know, to live in the country. It's just about time you grew up. You had better get rooms of your own. I shall hate to lose you, but it's for the best. It's quite impossible in a family like this for a son to develop any originality at all."

On the whole Maurice welcomed the suggestion, and it effectively quietened Mr. Kennedy, who had not meant his petulant outbursts to be taken quite so seriously.

The change from family life to "digs" is not infrequently one of the most important in a man's develop-

ment. For the first time the essentially restraining influence in his life is removed. He has a latch-key, with a totally different significance from the one which admitted him to his father's house; no one takes any notice of what happens, though occasionally a landlady of the motherly type is found, and the pained look on her face when she brings in the bacon after the fledgling has arrived home very late the night before is the most irritating happening in the early life of a man "on his own."

Maurice's rooms were on the first floor, and Mrs. Holl-
yer, the lady of the house, had carefully pointed out their advantages at their first interview. The sitting-room overlooked the gardens of a big Institution; the rooms were quiet, the house and the road being "select"; the charges were inclusive; the "table" was "liberal"; there were no children in the house; it was, as Mrs. Hollyer summed it up a little ominously, "A Home from Home." When she came to the last, inevitable phrase she quietly folded her arms across her ample front and awaited his decision. There was only one thing to do; he took the rooms.

And thus on a day Maurice Kennedy found himself in rooms of his own. The sitting-room possessed two quite comfortable arm-chairs, a sofa, the springs of which had long since given up an unequal struggle, a gate-leg table, a faded carpet with a hole nearly hidden by the friendly table, sundry decrepit vases, and some impossible pictures. He found it, after a few minutes of actual occupation, depressing in the extreme, and sought solace in the view of the garden. Presently he went on with the work of unpacking his belongings; his two little book-cases and his photos lent a human touch to the room, made it less public and general, more personal to him.

He was interrupted by Mrs. Hollyer, who brought in his tea. She was cheerful and optimistic and hoped that he was feeling at home. And then she left him to his solitary meal. Never in all his life had he felt quite so lonely. Often before he had had a meal alone, but never with such a conscious sense of loneliness. A man in rooms gets more or less used to those lonely meals after a while, but Kennedy had yet to discover that comforting fact.

When Mrs. Hollyer answered his bell after the meal, he nervously approached her on the subject of the pictures. He had a peculiar taste in pictures, he admitted; would she mind if he substituted some of his own for the ones which were there?

"I don't mind what you do, Mr. Kennedy," Mrs. Hollyer assured him cheerfully. "Put yer own up by all means. Some gents 'as peculiar tastes in pictures, I know, and there's no pleasing everybody in such things. I'm not partial to the nood, Mr. Kennedy, though as far as that goes yer see extraornery pictures nowadays in quite respectable houses."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hollyer. I thought that I might have hurt your feelings if I took the pictures down without mentioning it."

"Takes more than that to 'urt *my* feelings, I can assure you, Mr. Kennedy. I've kep' a boarding-house for nearly twenty-five years, ever since 'Olyer was took."

"You've been a widow twenty-five years?" Kennedy asked politely.

"I 'ave, and brought up four children, *and* turned 'em out into the world so as they're doing well for theirselves. But I've always said that it was a mercy 'Olyer was took. He was a cruel sufferer, Mr. Kennedy. I remember. . . ."

Here followed details of a medical character appertaining to the defunct "Olyer." Once a landlady is started on the subject of her deceased husband she tells all. Had Maurice Kennedy been a boarder of greater experience he would have known better than to start Mrs. Hollyer on the question of Death. There was nothing to do and he sat it out.

"You've had a hard life, Mrs. Hollyer," he said at the end, and, much solaced by her recitation, the landlady went about her varied occupations, leaving the new lodger to continue the adjusting of himself to the new conditions of his existence.

He missed the evening chat with his mother very much, and to his annoyance he found that he was not in a mood for reading. He went to the Music Hall near the Junction, where, fortunately, there were several turns which made him laugh.

That night for the first time he definitely slept away from his father's roof. Or, to be more true to the spirit of the fact, from his mother's roof.

There was a letter for him in the morning and he recognized Bateman's peculiar, pointed writing. Kennedy was invited to go to his friend's rooms that evening if he had nothing more amusing to do.

Bateman lived near Westminster Bridge, on the Surrey side, and the house turned out to be almost picturesquely old when Kennedy, who had not been there before, at length found it.

An elderly woman answered his knock. She was very thin, and very clean.

"Mr. Bateman?" she repeated his query. "Top floor. You'd better go up." Half-way up the dimly lit stairs he heard Bateman's voice from the darkness above.

"That you, Kennedy?"

"Yes."

"Right up, then."

He followed his host into a big, low room which was lit by heavily shaded lights. To his surprise, he found two ladies there. They rose as he entered.

"This is Maurice Kennedy," Bateman said, "Miss Esther Pensimmon and Miss Fanny Huggett."

"I was reading Yeats as you came in," Bateman said.

"Go on with it, please," urged Maurice, as he took the chair which Bateman had indicated, and, a little to his surprise, his host picked up a slender volume at his side without more ado. "I'll start at the beginning of the poem again," he said, and did so.

Kennedy thought the whole affair rather surprising, but anyway Bateman read the Irish poet's work finely. His deep voice provided an excellent medium for its delivery.

Beautiful as the poems were, and exquisitely as they were read, Kennedy's attention wandered a little. It was a very big room in which he was, and the fireplace was large, even in proportion. The fender was of oak, raised perhaps two feet from the floor, and the top of the fender was flat, forming a comfortable seat. The reader was sitting on it at the moment. The floor was covered with a Japanese rush carpet of quaint design, and the center of the room was occupied with an enormous chesterfield on which the two girls were sitting.

The light was too dim for him to distinguish the pictures although he could see they had narrow black frames. And everywhere were books: in book cases, stacked on the floor, on the window seats; they appeared to have overflowed and inundated the room.

He wished he had read more of Yeats; the poems which were read were entirely unknown to him. He liked to know a poem before he heard it read, to know it well. At home when they had been alone his mother had often read to him, but great as was his admiration

for her, he saw at once that this was a much finer interpretation than any of which she was capable.

Bateman had the rare gift of apparently deepening, or at least bringing out the meaning of what he read; it was as if the words of the poet had found a medium which was exquisitely theirs.

The girls were both deeply interested in Bateman's reading. Miss Pensimmon, the elder, wore pince-nez. She was thin, with a clever, austere face which reminded Kennedy of a photo of his mother taken just after he was born. In the dim light she was pretty, but pince-nez are very trying in any light. The younger was a totally different type. She was plump and had masses of fair hair; there was no doubt of her prettiness. It struck Kennedy that she formed the complement of Bateman. She was everything he was not.

Bateman was reading that wonderful "Fragment" of Yeats. He brought out the value and meaning of every word, and gripped Kennedy's elusive attention as in a vice.

"When you are old and gray and full of years . . ." and on to the magnificent last line.

Before he came to the end of the poem he closed the book quietly. He knew the poem by heart and the closing of the book had a subtle, and almost unperceived influence, on the three people who listened to him.

A silence followed.

"Good Lord, if one could write like that!" Bateman said with a little noise which was very near a sigh. "It almost makes a man decide never to write another word."

"Have you read much of Yeats, Mr. Kennedy?" Miss Pensimmon asked.

"No, I haven't. But I shall," Maurice answered.

"I wish I hadn't!" said Bateman.

"Max!" This from the other girl. "You rave about him."

"Yes, but fancy the wild joy of taking up a book of poems which one had never read and settling down with a pipe to discover . . . fairyland, to do so for the first time. I don't think one ever quite recaptures the charm of first reading a great poem on reading it subsequently. Fancy 'Prometheus' for the first time, or a hundred others from Shelley."

"Poetry is like Youth, Max, in that respect," Miss Pensimmon said.

There was a knock at the door and the landlady came in and passed through to the room behind, which was separated from the one in which they were by folding doors. She carried a tray covered with a white cloth and a minute or so later she re-appeared.

"Ready, Mr. Bateman," she said, briefly, and departed.

"A wonderful woman!" said Bateman. "Kennedy, will you take in Miss Pensimmon?"

It was a strange dining room which Maurice found. It was quite small and the oak table which occupied most of it had no cloth. It seemed very odd to one used to Mansfield Road to dine at an uncovered oak table. There was no silver on the table at all, but the glass was old and good. The dark oak of the table brought out unsuspected tints in it.

The room was lit with candles and Max Bateman's dislike of bright light was again seen in the dull green shades which softened even the candle light.

Bateman was at the head of the table and when his guests were seated he took the lid from a tureen of soup. It was artichoke soup, and delicious. It was the only hot dish they had, and was followed by a vegetarian dish (mainly of ground nuts) and an excellent salad. The

vegetarian dish (which in its way was very good) seemed a natural corollary of the orgy of poetry before supper. The next course was an apple served with a little heap of the inevitable ground nuts, and the meal was brought to an end by some most admirable Stilton cheese which seemed a little out of harmony with what had gone before.

Afterwards the four returned to the big room.

During dinner Maurice had noticed several striking differences between the two girls. Miss Pensimmon was an educated woman and her hands had been attended to carefully, the nails were obviously polished. She had all the outward signs of a lady. Miss Huggett spoke indifferently, and her hands were red; had they not been so red Maurice would not have noticed those of the other girl. Miss Huggett was not a lady in the conventional meaning of the word; she was not quite certain of her table manners. She did nothing definitely wrong, but once or twice she had hesitated, and had not been at her ease. Before the meal, and afterwards when they were back in the big room, the difference was not noticeable, but Kennedy thought it odd to find two such different girls as fellow guests.

For awhile the talk was of Socialism and the various movements allied to it, and Kennedy found himself in an atmosphere which was frankly revolutionary. Perhaps it was some strain of his mother in him, but he found it quite easy to adapt himself, to listen without irritation to ideas which were daringly new. It seemed quite natural to be in a world where nothing whatever was accepted without reasonable proof. The talk drifted into Feminism, and Kennedy found that Miss Pensimmon was inclined to bitterness. The younger girl spoke at some length, and occasional lapses reminded Kennedy of the impression he had formed at dinner.

The girls went just after ten, and after the men had seen them off they returned to Bateman's rooms where they talked until nearly midnight, at least Bateman did.

Kennedy learnt that Esther Pensimmon was a leading feminist, and that under a pseudonym she wrote short stories for the various magazines, work which she despised but which she did in order to live. Her father was a wealthy solicitor with whom she had quarreled. She had chosen independence and comparative poverty to the sacrifice of her opinions. Her father had compromised to the extent of giving her the very best education that modern England can give a woman, but that apparently had not sufficed.

Bateman had a gift of imparting enthusiasm, and in the shaded light his sallow face, as he leaned forward slightly to emphasize a point, impressed itself in the other's memory. His justification of Esther Pensimmon, however, left his guest cold.

During a lull in the talk, Kennedy asked why Miss Pensimmon was so bitter when she spoke of men. "She's almost a man-hater!" he added.

Bateman shrugged his shoulders. "What would you?" he said. "She is wrong, of course, it is not *men*, it's the whole cursed system we live under. I can't make her see it."

"Miss Huggett is much more reasonable," Kennedy said.

"Yes. . . What do you think of her?"

"In what way?"

"Generally . . . how does she strike you on first acquaintance?"

"She's pretty. . . ."

"Yes?" Kennedy was conscious of a queer anxiety in his friend and became cautious.

"A charming girl, I think. It's almost impossible

to form definite opinions on so short an acquaintance."

"I've known her for two years, ever since I came to London. I joined a Socialist Branch in Walworth where I met her. It struck me that a girl . . . a working girl, who had sufficient individuality to think herself into a position so unlike that occupied by most of her sex and class, was worth while."

"She's a working girl?"

"Yes. Until eighteen months ago she spent ten hours a day pasting labels on bottles of gin in a bonded warehouse, mainly for export to the natives of Africa. What she told me about the conditions of work would turn a sensitive man's soul to vinegar.

"I got her out of it," Bateman went on after a pause. "A job with reasonable hours and better pay. She's a different girl since. I hope we are going to marry each other one of these days."

He made the announcement quite casually. Kennedy was too surprised even to murmur the conventional remarks.

"I was rather interested in seeing how she would strike a middle-class person like yourself," Bateman said, and his smile robbed the words of any unpleasantness. "She wouldn't do for Mansfield Road?" he added.

"They judge wholly by non-essentials there, I agree," said Kennedy.

"I shouldn't worry personally," said Bateman. "But Fanny does. She is mortally sensitive about such things as table-manners . . . non-essentials as you call them. It is amazing how she has picked up things these last few months. When I first met her, her tastes were all wrong, in clothes and so on, I mean. In a twelvemonth she has learned almost everything a middle-class girl learns in the first twenty years of her life. As I said, I shouldn't worry about it at all, but Fanny insists that

before she marries me she shall have acquired these non-essentials. No amount of arguing will alter her."

"What a quaint chap you are," said Kennedy. "You talk about the whole affair in such a detached manner, so dispassionately."

"Well, the whole thing is quaint. The idea of a girl insisting on reaching a certain level of social equipment before she marries, is quaint in itself. She has simply refused to meet my friends until to-night. Esther Pensimmon is an exception; she is a member of the little Socialist Club in Walworth."

"It is a big experiment," suggested Kennedy.

"That's just it. It is an experiment. But all life is, or should be, an experiment. The Socialist is attempting to make the nation as a whole experiment instead of continuing to drift on in the old melancholy manner. Where things cease to experiment—as in religion—they die. That last sentence is rather confused but you gather my meaning?"

"The world will be an exciting place!" Kennedy said, with a smile.

"Precisely; that is what it should be," Bateman said. "To-day it's dull."

Bateman came to the door with him when at last he went, and on his way home Kennedy thought over the evening he had passed. He attempted to fathom the attraction Max Bateman had for him. It was not the views he held; Kennedy was far from conversion to them. It must be, he imagined, the subtle thing known as personality, although he had no clear idea what he meant by the word. Possibly it was the man's quaintness . . . this reading of poetry and the coming marriage with a working girl, and so on.

What would Gwendoline think of it, if she knew? And Reggy? He smiled, as he had smiled before, when he thought of Reggy in connection with Max Bateman.

CHAPTER FIVE

MR. KENNEDY retired from the office which had been the scene of his life's work a week or so after Maurice, at his mother's instigation, took the first step in growing up. His colleagues presented him with a case of pipes which, he said during the inevitable speech, would rank among his treasured possessions. It was an affecting little ceremony, and afterwards he passed the massive and familiar doors for the last time. He was a little lost at home that evening; he told his wife of the emotions which had come to him and found the sympathy he needed in her wise, soft eyes. He pointed out the wonderful straight grain of the six pipes to her and polished them from time to time lovingly. She duly admired them in the slightly dazed way peculiar to women when they talk of pipes. Quite suddenly she kissed him, and he saw there were tears in her eyes.

"We've come a long way together, dear," she said, and smiled bravely through her tears.

The removal to the country was deferred for a while owing to Gwendoline's approaching marriage.

Maurice heard the news one evening when he had dropped in casually at his home. His mother told him before his sister came down. It was obvious that the announcement had already stirred all the latent sentimentalism in Mr. Kennedy, and he was in a depressingly reminiscent mood and talked of "my little girl."

The brother was . . . startled. Although Reggy had been at Eighty-seven four or five times a week for many

months Kennedy had never regarded him seriously as a potential brother-in-law, no matter how brilliantly the diamonds sparkled on Gwendoline's hand. It seemed absurd to think of him as a husband; Maurice watched his mother's face, wondering what thoughts were behind that kindly mask.

Later Reggy came and was for awhile nervous because of the coming marriage of which they talked. He was cheerfully communicative about his finances; he was rather proud of his stability. His old man, it transpired, was pretty warm, and as Reggy was the sole offspring of the old man in question, it followed that on a day Reggy himself would be pretty warm.

"I am practically my own master," Reggy pointed out. He adjusted imaginary defects in his tie, and hitched the knees of his beautiful trousers. Gwendoline looked on with bright eyes, and once a queer little look flashed across her mother's face as she watched.

It is useless to analyze love, idle to point out unconscious motives in the lovers and in the old, old forces behind the lovers. It is cowardly to be cynical about such things, cowardly and rather foolish; the brightness in a girl's eyes when she listens to her Reggy is a wild, unanswerable retort to the Cynic.

Gwendoline said good-by to her beloved in the hall, alone; afterwards her brother watched her flushed face. It was amazing. He had never noticed a trace of originality in his future brother-in-law, not a thought, nothing which removed him from his type. Reggy was arrogantly mediocre, and yet wholly satisfied with himself. But there was the undeniable brightness in Gwen's eyes, and the flush of her cheeks. Of course, Reggy was a decent enough chap . . .

Gwendoline broke in on her brother's thoughts by kissing him suddenly. "Good-night, Maurice," she said,

and was gone. It was odd in her, he thought, for the Kennedys were normally a most undemonstrative family. It left him musing by the fire on the nature of love, a subject on which men have mused since there were men in the world. He found out just as much as the others had done.

"And what do you think of it, Maurice?" his mother asked. "I can see you're thinking of it," she added, with a smile.

"It's a great surprise," he said, having nothing else to say.

"In a sense it is to me," she replied. "I knew it would come, sooner or later, but it's none the less of a shock when it does come. It seems but yesterday when the two of you were babies. But every mother says that when her children marry.

"People in love apparently are capable of amazing illusions," the son said. "I mean," he added, "self-deception."

"That isn't peculiar to love, Maurice," his mother replied with that quiet smile of hers.

"But the kind of illusion I mean is," he persisted. "A person in love imagines heroic qualities in the object of his affection; he really *believes* in the illusion he conjures up."

The mother was silent for awhile, looking down into the fire.

"I sometimes think," she said at last, and slowly, "that illusions are the most valuable things in life. If one is wise one hugs one's illusions, happiness, and love, and the others. . . ."

"You sometimes remind me very much of Bateman," her son said. "In the way you talk, I mean," he added.

"Max, too, has his illusions," Mrs. Kennedy said.

"And I?" her son asked.

"I hope so," she replied gravely, but behind her wise gray eyes an unseen smile lurked. A little later he went.

The great day came; it is the habit even of great days.

Maurice had been invited to be best man and, reluctantly, had undertaken that office. He wore the conventional clothes with conventional stiffness.

Mr. Kennedy gave the bride away spaciously. At the reception at Eighty-seven he made a speech commencing with "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking. . . ." He would.

The bridegroom's father was even more expansive, but his spaciousness was tinctured with an arrogance which was a little offensive. He made a speech in which he described himself as a self-made man and asserted that he was "proud of it too." These self-made men are a melancholy tribe usually, and it is just as well that they are prepared to accept responsibility for themselves.

The bride was absurdly youthful in appearance and Maurice remembered her slim white figure and starry eyes long afterwards. Reggy made a much better groom than might have been expected.

Kneeling a little behind the two figures at the chancel steps Maurice had a queer feeling of isolation. The frankness of the Marriage Service startled him profoundly, and as he listened it was as if it were intensely personal to his white little sister kneeling there just in front of him. He wanted to take her away from it all, from the white-robed priest and the husky-voiced Reggy, and the little boys in the choir who were whispering to each other and taking apparently not the slightest interest in the ceremony which bound two human beings together until death would them part.

"I will!"

The words came to Maurice with a sudden realization that his sister was married.

Afterwards, after the speeches and the champagne and the wedding-cake, and the tears and the rest of the impediments of wedding in Mansfeld Road, there was an interview between an agitated Reggy and his best man.

"There's to be no damned nonsense, Maurice," Reggy insisted. "No beastly confetti and all that. You will do your best to keep the blighters from making asses of themselves, won't you?"

Maurice promised, knowing that nothing he could do would prevent the inevitable confetti, for in Mansfeld Road confetti stands for finality in marriage, and despite the many objections to it, its clinging remnant is a badge of respectability in a hotel bedroom.

Once Gwendoline had left Mansfeld Road for the astonishingly new little home in Clapham Park, which was "sweetly" furnished in the Tottenham Court Road style, her parents completed the preparations for their removal.

Maurice had cycled many miles in Surrey looking for the house they wanted. After much effort he found one just outside Shere and his mother was delighted with it. Mr. Kennedy had a really good garden in which to occupy his time.

A week after they were in Mrs. Kennedy wrote to her son: "It's lovely, Maurice . . . it's just as if we had come to anchor in a tiny land-locked bay. Your father is very happy. . . ."

The letter left him thoughtful.

CHAPTER SIX

MRS. HOLLYER'S boarding house was on the list at the local theater and from time to time members of the "Profesh." stayed with her. Kennedy soon came to recognize them; the men were as distinct as policemen and the girls usually cheaply smart with florid-complexions, high heels, and low blouses.

Some months after Kennedy had come to Mrs. Hollyer's, he met a girl coming into the house as he left it in the morning. He stood aside for her to enter and she thanked him prettily as she passed. She was hatless and was dressed in a plain tweed costume, and was utterly unlike the ladies who usually stayed with Mrs. Hollyer. Her black hair was slightly ruffled in the wind and apparently she had been for a walk on the Common before breakfast. She was extremely pretty with dark, attracting eyes. As she had thanked him she had looked into his eyes, momentarily but frankly, and it left him vaguely disturbed, so much so indeed that his paper was read very perfunctorily indeed on his way to town. The dark hair and eyes and the flash of her glance remained with him; they came into his office with him, disturbed his work.

At tea-time Mrs. Hollyer, sounded on the matter of the new guest, waxed eloquent. A lady, if ever there was one, was Miss Evie Tierney, and Mrs. Hollyer knew a lady when she saw one if she knew nothing else. Such at least was Mrs. Hollyer's expressed opinion.

"On the stage?"—Mrs. Hollyer had repeated Ken-

nedy's question—"Yes, she's on the stage, but she's a cut above the usual professional."

That was the sum total of the information Kennedy could obtain from Mrs. Hollyer, for the excellent reason that it was all that Mrs. Hollyer knew of her new boarder. Just after six o'clock, from his window, he saw her go out. She was dressed in a costume of some dark cloth, and he watched her until she was hidden by a bend in the road. The following morning he met her half-way down the road. He looked anxiously for a sign of recognition, but none was forthcoming.

Followed another slightly disturbed day.

It was impossible to broach the subject of Miss Tierney again, and Mrs. Hollyer was uncommunicative to the point of moroseness when she brought in his tea. Again, about the same time as on the previous evening, he watched her as far as the bend in the road. As he was glancing from his window he had heard her come down from the floor above his.

He reached home late that evening and was sitting smoking in his room when he heard her come in. He had left his door slightly open, for the night was warm, so that he heard her key in the door below and her step on the stairs. To his amazement, instead of going upstairs she stopped at his door and knocked.

"Come in!" he said jerkily, and she came in. On the threshold she stopped.

"I . . . I beg your pardon. I thought it was Mrs. Hollyer's room . . . I . . . wanted a match. . . ."

"Not at all," he said, and then, inanely, "the pleasure's mine . . . let me give you a match." He was conscious of blundering horribly.

"I'm so sorry to disturb you," she said as he gave her a box of matches.

"Not at all," he said again, and again inanely. In the lamplight he saw that she had flushed.

"Thank you!" she said. "Good-night!"

She turned and was gone before he could reach the open door to hold it for her. As she disappeared it struck him as absurd that he should have wished to hold an already open door for her.

She left a faint suggestion of a scent, a ghost of a perfume behind her; it reminded him of evening prim-roses.

And then, very solemnly, he closed the door.

The faint perfume lingered and he visualized her where she had stood. Her confusion at finding herself in his room had heightened her splendid coloring, he thought. He was glad she had been confused.

And even yet she was somewhere overhead, beneath the same roof as he.

They met again the following morning. She stopped, and held out a box of matches.

"Thank you very much," she said, with a smile.

"You shouldn't have bothered," he replied lamely.

He raised his hat as she went on. He was a little puzzled, almost disappointed.

The next evening he met her leaving the station. It was nearly midnight, and he asked to be allowed to escort her home. He actually used the phrase "allowed to escort." She smiled at him and said: "I shall be pleased. I hate the walk at night. One gets down so late from the show."

An absurd desire to offer to meet her always came to his lips but he had sufficient sense to stifle it. As they walked along the talk naturally was of theaters and the people thereof. She was, it appeared, in "The Purple Pansy" at the Imperial Theater. A tiny part, but a

part. Three whole lines—this information was imparted to him with a merry laugh. She talked amusingly of the stage and the people on it. In an annoyingly short time they were at Mrs. Hollyer's front door.

"Thanks so much for your escort," she said gravely.

"The pleasure is mine," he said—and even as he used the parrot phrase he could have kicked himself for doing so.

With a smile which was faintly lost in the dimness of the stairs she said "Good-night," and a few seconds later Kennedy heard her door close somewhere overhead.

He met her the following night; and the next.

On the third evening he told her that he was going on the river on the following Sunday from Richmond.

"You lucky man!" she said.

"Will you join me?" he asked eagerly.

"But surely there is some one you are taking. You were not going alone?"

"No one, I assure you," he said eagerly.

"Then I shall be pleased. I love the river although I have not yet been on this season."

"We will start early if you will," he said. "At ten?"

"That will do splendidly," she said. "I shall love it."

In spite of the feeling of wild elation he said good-night very gravely; once again he heard her door close quietly overhead. Left alone he compared her with other girls he had known, and decided that it was her unconventionality he admired.

He looked from his window very early on Sunday morning. The Fates had smiled, for the morning was fine with a promise of heat to come. He dressed with care and Miss Tierney joined him in the hall a very few

minutes after ten. She was dressed in a white serge skirt with a blouse of some soft white material, showing daintily under a dull cerise sports-coat. A burberry was slung over her arm and her hat toned with the coat she wore. She was dainty, and fresh, and provocatively feminine.

They decided to go by bus to Richmond as it was clearer than the railway; the ride was exhilarating.

They were in very high spirits when they arrived at Richmond and the holiday aspect of the little town was in harmony with their feelings. Groups of people in white were making their way to the Bridge from which animated punts and skiffs were starting upstream.

Kennedy always obtained his punt from the same waterman—a broad-shouldered, red-faced man of extreme volubility—and on this morning a judiciously expended half-crown obtained preference for him, so that they met with little delay at the Bridge, despite the crowd.

Kennedy punted. His tall, white-clad figure was striking, even among the river-people, and his body moved rhythmically once his punt was clear of the crush of boats around the steps.

They had lunch at the hotel on the island a mile or so above the bridge. The lunch was quite ordinary save for the white Italian wine which laughed up at them from the glasses. But the environment of the lunch!

Surely meals are much more the product of their environment than are humans! From the balcony where they sat they overlooked the river, green, moving and cool, and beyond, through a haze of heat, were meadows and trees and the blue skies merging in the distance into the spaces of the great park. The river was alive with color and glorious Youth. White prevailed, strenuous white, with here and there splashes of

feminine color. A girl went by with a vividly red sunshade, another—in white from head to foot—punted slowly, with infinite grace. The poise of her body was pure joy; her control of her craft exquisite. Simply clad, she yet riveted attention. As she passed them the sun kissed her golden hair to glory. She might have been Youth.

"I wish I could punt," Miss Tierney said. "Isn't that girl just *too* lovely!"

Almost reluctantly they went back to their punt and for awhile they remained moored in the welcome coolness of an ancient tree's shade.

It seemed absurd that he should continue to address her formally.

"Most people call me Evie," she said, with a little smile, when he broached the matter.

She smoked a cigarette he offered her, smoked it daintily and with evident enjoyment. He was not certain that he liked her to smoke, and did not offer her a second. He found, however, that she had a tiny case of her own. She offered him a cigarette from it.

It was an afternoon made for idleness and Kennedy achieved absolute contentment. Evie talked intermittently, but now and again little happy silences came to the punt.

"Do you know, I could go to sleep!" she asked with a bewitchingly lazy smile.

"Am I so dull?" he asked.

"No . . . it isn't that; it's just happiness. There's nothing I want."

"It is ripping," he agreed tritely. "We might have known each other half a lifetime," he added.

She turned over on her side and looked down into the water.

"It's another world down there," she said, and after a pause she went on with an odd touch of seriousness in her voice. "All around us are other worlds which we never suspect."

Kennedy did not comment on her words, but long afterwards he remembered them.

With the aid of a small spirit stove they made tea in the punt and so missed the crowd which the afternoon brought to the island. Kennedy had provided far more sandwiches and cake than were necessary, even allowing for the appetite which comes to one on the water. She washed up afterwards, and he admired the deft way she did the work and the neatness with which she stored the crockery in the little basket.

"You appear to be thoroughly domesticated," he said jokingly, as he sat meditatively smoking his pipe.

She smiled but made no reply.

They remained where they were for half an hour, and then dropped down to the island to listen to the concert. Every mooring was taken and Kennedy paddled slowly up and down.

The sun was sinking over Twickenham church when they turned downstream and the shadows were lengthening across the water. The evening was wonderfully still, and flies which were flying low, almost on the water, told of more heat to come on the morrow. Kennedy let the punt drift with the tide and only moved his paddle to miss any boat coming upstream. Neither spoke much; there was something in the quality of the evening which forbade speech, and in silence they watched the sunset's passion waste and fade.

Hammerton's was passed and they came to Glover's Island; misty ghosts were rising from the water in the faint luminosity of the evening.

"Shall we tie up awhile?" he asked.

"Yes . . . it's a shame to go in a night like this," she said.

He moored his punt on the Surrey side of the island, a little below the top, and as he did so she moved slightly, making room for him at her side.

The light came softly through the green leaves overhead and in its faint vagueness she was very beautiful. Stray wisps of her dark hair improved the neatness of the morning, and her dark eyes took to themselves a darker, deeper tone in the half-light. Over Petersham, a faint wisp of a moon was just visible in the pale blue sky. Kennedy, his head on his hand, was turned towards her, and though she, too, was looking out to where the maiden moon hung daintily, she knew that his eyes were on her.

Suddenly she turned to him and smiled.

"I've been happier to-day than I have been since I don't know how long."

"I'm glad," he said, a little awkwardly, startled by the quick brightness of her eyes. He was seized by a sudden desire to take her in his arms, to kiss the soft lips that were so maddeningly, and so suddenly, near him. She was there with all the witchery and the magic of her dark eyes, there, by his side. He could feel her breathing. . . .

But he did nothing; why he did not know. Instinct, impulse urged him, but he did not. She turned away as suddenly as she had looked at him and he saw the tip of a tiny ear beneath her black hair.

So they remained in silence; she looking at the cold, maiden moon and he at the ear's tip. He noticed the perfect line of the face and neck, a wonderful line; she noticed, who shall say? Perhaps the slip of a virgin moon, for it was at that she was looking.

It was nearly dark when they set out once more, and for all the heat of the day there was a tiny suggestion of cold in the air. She put on her coat and sat up as he punted. They shot round the bend opposite to Messums, and below them they saw the lights of the bridge. A motor-bus rumbled over from the Twickenham side and the witchery of the evening was ended; the river's illusion, the brief respite from London, was no more. Almost sadly they turned in at the steps where there were people and watermen who bawled directions across the water to boats in difficulties.

"We'll have some grub in the Town!" he suggested.

She hesitated, but in the end he had his way and they had a quaint little meal at a tiny restaurant half-way up the hill. But the day was done. This was London.

They said good-night in Mrs. Hollyer's hall and she thanked him for what she called "a delightful day." He held her hand perhaps a few seconds longer than one normally does, and then she turned upstairs. Again he heard her door close overhead and then slowly and a little thoughtfully he went to his own room.

His mind was a jumbled mass of impressions and memories, particularly of that moment when she had turned suddenly to him in the deepening shadows of Glover's Island. He had imagined at the moment some extraordinary thing in her eyes, but it was all vague, and his memories were half desires even yet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KENNEDY was very unsettled on the evening which followed the day on the river; he found the book he was reading tedious—which he knew that he should not have done, for Bateman had told him that it was *Good*. It was one of Henry James's, and Kennedy had yet to discover that James is, like the bay-rum in the story, an acquired taste. He became completely lost in one of the sentences, and instead of going back to the beginning of it, he decided to go to town and call on Bateman. He would be able afterwards, he knew, to get to Waterloo in time to meet Evie Tierney. . . .

Bateman's landlady was more affable than usual.

"There's a *gent* with him, sir," she said, and the subtle emphasis she put on the horrid little word spoke of abysmal respect. "A real gent," she added, apparently to clarify her meaning.

"Hallo, stranger!" Bateman greeted him. "Come in. My brother's here . . . Maurice Kennedy, Roland Bateman."

There was an unmistakable family likeness in the two brothers, but in spite of it they succeeded in differing widely. Both were tall; Ronald (the elder) was much the more robust. From a woman's point of view, both were good-looking, but something tense and enthusiastic in Max was missing in his brother. There was a lack of spirituality in Ronald, an absence of poignancy in spite of his fine eyes. Around his mouth was a stubbornness which was much more noticeable than the keen strength which lurked around the more delicately chiselled lips of the younger brother.

"My brother's in the Army," Max said, as Kennedy sat down. "An officer and a gentleman."

The brother smiled.

"I wonder what my mess mates would think of *my* brother!" he said.

"You know what I think of them," Max parried with a laugh.

"You don't know 'em, Max."

"I do. I know their type. . . . That is enough."

The elder Bateman knew his brother too well to argue with him, and he turned to Kennedy. "I come to see my brother regularly about once a year and never yet have I found anything to drink here. . . ." He spoke very seriously.

"I have some light, white wine," said Max, "which you have refused."

"Naturally! A man doesn't want white wine at this time, he wants a whisky and soda. I had wine when I fed. By the way, d'yer see that young Melton's been divorced? He's one of ours, you know. Some lad that, by Jove!"

"Sir James Melton!" said Max. "I saw the case. He seems rather a foul-minded young beast, I thought. But when it's all over no doubt he will be received back by Society with open arms. The women of his set—ladies—will find him just a little more interesting. It shows, my dear chap, the folly of allowing such unintelligent young men to control vast masses of wealth."

"D'you ever know such a chap?" asked the elder brother helplessly. "I don't want to argue about poor Melton, I was simply saying something. . . . You get your teeth into what a chap says and make a confounded sermon on it. You ought to be in . . ." he hesitated for the word.

"The church?" asked Max, innocently.

"Oh, Lord, no!" his brother replied. "You'll never do anything half as sane as that. You'll be in some little freak religion in Spitalfields or somewhere, soup kitchen, an' all that. By the way, heard a rippin' story the other day. I wonder if you've heard it? It's about a girl in a tobacconist's shop."

"Yes, Ronald, I have," said Max. "So has Kennedy. I've heard all your stories."

"But I only heard this myself a few days ago. It's about a girl in . . ."

"I know," interrupted Max. "She was in the tobacconist's shop. Now, I won't have any of your stories. The last time you looked me up you told me two, I remember. I had a nasty taste in my mouth for a week."

The other laughed. "I sometimes wonder, Max, whether you're a man at all. You'd have been a damned sight better as a girl. You were meant to be a girl, I believe."

"You flatter me," Max replied evenly.

"Flatter you? I didn't mean to. I was gettin' a bit of my own back."

"By the way, I saw you some three or four months back, Ronald," Max said, changing the conversation.

"Did you? Where?" The elder brother asked.

"In the vestibule at Daly's."

"Yes. I was there one evening." A certain hesitancy had come into his voice.

"Rather pretty girl with you," Max went on.

"Oh! You do notice if a girl is pretty, then?" the elder brother replied. "I'm surprised at you, Max!"

"Yes. I like pretty girls," Max replied.

"Of course you do. I bet all you reforming Johnnies do."

"But she was *very* pretty," Max repeated.

"Yes . . . rather nice little kid," the other said cas-

nally, without volunteering any further information about her.

"Was she—I use your own terminology—a lady?" Max persisted.

"Depends what you mean, Max. Jolly little girl, anyway. That's as much as a chap wants, really."

"That's what I thought," Max said. "Jolly little girl," he repeated his brother's phrase with an odd emphasis.

"Well, even if it means another sermon, I don't mind admitting that I prefer her kind to . . . ladies. You've got to be so damned careful with ladies. I'll bet that starts him off," he added to Kennedy.

"Why should it?" replied Max. "It's part of your code. You really believe that there is a difference between the women of your own class and the women of mine."

"Your class?" the elder brother asked in an amazed tone.

"Yes. I'm a member of the working class . . . now."

"Don't be an ass!" the brother replied. He was treating what his brother had said very seriously.

"I work very hard indeed," Bateman insisted.

"Oh, writing and speaking?" the other said with a smile.

"That sums it up more or less. But this question of ladies . . . What about the little girl at the theater with you . . . You might tell us, Ronald; I think it would be interesting."

"She was a little girl, I know. That's about all."

"Rather pretty, dark eyes," Max said. Kennedy wondered why he insisted on talking about the girl in view of his brother's obvious reluctance.

"You seem jolly curious about that little girl!" commented Ronald.

"Frankly, I am. I liked her face . . ."

"I can give you her address if you like," the elder brother volunteered with an elaborate wink at Kennedy.

"Oh no, thanks. I was simply curious in an impersonal manner."

"That's a damned dull way, isn't it?"

"No. I find it quite amusing. But apparently you don't propose to pander to my curiosity by telling us about her."

"D'yer ever know such a chap, Kennedy?" the elder Bateman asked. "Like a blinking gimlet!"

"Between you, you've made me curious, I confess," Kennedy said.

"Well, if you really want to know, I'll tell you. It's very shocking and I'm surprised that any relative of such a good little fellow as Max so far forgot himself. But she was a jolly little girl and it was deuced easy to forget oneself, and my memory was never of the best. That reminds me of a story by the way . . ."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Max.

"Oh, all right!" said the elder, resignedly. "My God, what a brother!" he added. He looked at Kennedy and shook his head hopelessly, and went on with the story.

"Well, I met her one afternoon in Long Acre. I'd been to see a chap about a car, and I was walking along thinking over things when I saw her. I caught her eyes, she smiled, I smiled, and there you are. A jolly little girl!"

"Go on," said Max. "You're just getting interesting."

"You know, you wouldn't believe it, but the poor little devil was hungry," the elder brother said. A new note had come into his voice.

"No!" said Max mockingly. "Not hungry . . ."
His brother had spoken as if the fact of actual hunger had been a tremendous shock to him.

"If you know more about this girl than I do, you'd better get on with it," Ronald Bateman said tartly.

"If you want me to, I will," said Max.

"Go on then, Master Know-it-all!"

"You took her to dinner!" Max said.

"Wrong, my lad. I took her to tea. Even a member of the working class—clawrs rather—ought to know that one does not have dinner in the afternoon."

"Tea then," said Max unperturbably. "She told you her story . . ."

"Yes . . . she did. She'd had a rotten time. I know they all tell the tale—parson's daughter business—but she was different. She'd had a damned rotten time. She'd had a child—illegitimate, you know—and her people had turned her adrift, the swine. She had to keep the kid somehow and she'd been on the streets for nearly a month when I met her. The kid was in the country."

"I hardly suspected all this," confessed Max. "And what did you think of it all?"

"Damned rotten luck for her."

"And you still wonder why people are determined to change all this?" Max asked.

"Socialism?" the elder asked comprehensively. "And all that rot!" he went on. "Lot of good that 'ud do her. I'm not a bally Socialist, but I did my best to put her on her feet."

"You?" asked Max bluntly.

"Yes, I," The other replied. "You'd have turned the ladies of one of your beastly Leagues on to her."

"God forbid!" said Max.

"What would you have done?" challenged Ronald, "or you, Kennedy?"

"I should have helped her with money as far as I could," replied Kennedy. "It's difficult to know what to do."

"After all, there's only one way of dealing with the matter," said Max. "It must be made a national question. It's bound up inextricably with the general feminist question."

"Votes?" demanded the elder brother.

"Yes, and all that votes stand for," Max replied.

"Lot of good a vote would have done her!"

"I agree," said Max. "A tremendous amount of good. If women are enfranchised . . ."

"Come off it!" Ronald interrupted. "You don't like my stories and I'm damned if I do your speeches. I got the poor little devil a job in the chorus of a revue. . . . Brains, my lad. It was the only way. Put her right on her feet. She was pretty and could dance a bit. Damned sight more good to her than fifty votes."

"And you still see her?" asked Max.

"Occasionally. We were good . . . eh . . . pals for quite a while, but these little affairs never last, you know. She went on tour some time ago. Jolly little girl! I still see her sometimes."

"You do see, Ronald, don't you, that what you did doesn't affect the great question? It's no use lifting one girl out of the bog if the conditions under which we live are pushing others in all the time."

"But I'm not interested in the question as you call it. I *was* interested in one girl and I lifted *her* out of it."

"But surely," Kennedy put in, "you don't suggest, Max, that all the women one sees hanging about are . . . victims, like the one your brother has spoken about?"

"He doesn't know *anything* about them," put in

Ronald. "He'd be a damned sight more human if he did."

"One can know a great deal about them without . . . eh . . . patronizing them," Max said. "They're the product of the system which produced slums, grotesque wealth, all the regalia of modern life."

"I'm not a Puritan," said Kennedy, (the statement was nine tenths of a lie) "but I simply shudder when I see them about in droves. They're like cattle, animals."

"As a matter of fact, the phenomenon is not found among any animals, except humans. And yet we have the audacity to claim that we alone have souls and are made in the image of God!"

"You've no respect for anything, Max!" his brother protested.

"I've none for rottenness, or hypocrisy, and in modern England I'm regarded as eccentric as a result."

"Rot!" said the elder brother complacently. A little later he went.

"What do you think of him, Maurice?" Max asked when he returned to the sitting-room.

"Very decent chap, I should think. His outlook is different from yours."

"Rather!" Bateman said, with a laugh. "He looks me up every six months or so. I don't see eye to eye with my family, you know. I suspect they keep me in view through the agency of these periodic lookings-up. We are always comparatively friendly when we meet, Ronald and I. We simply don't touch anywhere, and with the rest of my family it's worse. However . . ."

They fell to talking of other things and Kennedy spoke at some length of Evie Tierney. He left in time to meet her at Waterloo. She was surprised to see him there, and obviously pleased.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MOST evenings Kennedy met Evie Tierney at the Junction and they would walk through deserted streets to Mrs. Hollyer's. They spent several Sundays together on the river, and once they wandered all day through the pine-woods at Oxshott. More and more his life seemed to pivot on hers, but delightful as Kennedy found the arrangement, he was filled with a sense of uneasiness which often solidified into depression. There was that about the girl with whom he had fallen in love—he was quite certain of the correct description of his feelings—which stirred some deep emotion in him not unlike fear. There was an aloofness about her, a reticence; it was as if her life up to the day she had stood in his room, asking him confusedly for matches, was vague and dim, behind a veil.

One evening they were returning from the river. There was a touch of Autumn in the air, a faint unsettling sense of change. She took his arm and he noticed that she leaned rather heavily on it.

"You are a dear boy," she said, with a little smile as they stood together in the hall and suddenly she kissed him. Immediately she slipped away.

Alone in his rooms his thoughts centered on one fleeting impression which had come to him in the vague, wonderful, half-light by Glover's Island. He had imagined that she had wanted him to make love to her. Now that she was no longer by his side the impression became an insistent idea . . . she had wanted him even as he had wanted her. And there was that kiss in the

darkened hall. He could still feel the lingering thrill of her lips, warm and sudden, on his, and smell the faint perfume she had left behind her when she had slipped away into the darkness . . . the yellow evening flowers. . . .

The night was reposeful and his thoughts became jumbled, less clear, a mass of impressions and vague, soft memories; the room was in darkness save for the calming moonlight, blue and mysterious. For six hours he had been on the water, six long, sunlit hours, and easily he yielded to the sleepy feeling which came to him. His thoughts became still more drowsy, still more jumbled. She was by his side again, by the side of his comfortable old roomy chair, just as she had been by his side all those long hours on the water. She was looking down at him with that dark glance of hers, wonderful and alluring.

Suddenly she bent down to him and kissed him on the lips just as she had done in the darkened hall. Again he felt her lips on his, and the wild warmth of her kiss.

He sat up suddenly, only half awake, but with every nerve in his body tingling. Did the door of his room close gently? He turned to it, still only half awake. It was closed. But surely in the air, around him, in his startled senses, was the scent of the evening Primrose! He was dreaming still perhaps. Half lurching he crossed to his door, and opened it, looking out into the dark landing. Somewhere upstairs, very quietly, he heard a door close . . . a door which closed like no other door in the world . . .

For awhile he stood there in the doorway of his room, the color drained from his face. Then quietly, as there was nothing else to do, he went back.

He met her as usual at the station on the following night.

Neither referred to the evening before, but Kennedy imagined a constraint in their talk. It might quite easily have been that she was tired, or it might have existed only in his imagining, but it made him a little awkward.

"Thank goodness I'm home," she said, in the dim little hall. "I feel tragically old to-night." She made a little laugh in which was no laughter, and with a brief "Good-night" turned and left him.

His room seemed very big and empty that night.

The week went by. He never saw her in the morning, but each night she found him waiting in the queer little underground tunnel of the station. Each night they parted in the hall and he remained alone in that empty echoing room of his. Afterwards, months afterwards, when those walks up from the station and the girl herself, had become memories, he was still uncertain why he had gripped himself so tightly. Why he had, desperately, not made love to her; more uncertain still was he in the aching hours when she was so near to him. Once towards the end of the week he had glanced down at her by his side, in the bluey electric light, to find her eyes on his face, and wild things in her eyes.

And through it all he believed that he was in love with her, believed that she was vitally female to his male, knew that he wanted her, wanted her with an aching longing. In his love was all the poignancy of a first love, all the devotion of which youth alone is capable. If she loved him it was with a different love, for she knew more of the infinite ramifications of love than he would ever know. Love alone could not give the knowledge that was hers.

Sunday came and they spent the day on the river, idling the golden hours away. And again came the parting in the little hall.

"I don't think I've ever enjoyed a day quite so much in my life before," she said simply.

"Nor I!" he added. "It seems horrible that it should end . . . like this. You in your lonely room, I mean, and I in mine."

She turned away and for a moment stood in silence.

"No," she said, and then, as if she had jerked the words out she said, "Good-night." Almost at once he had lost her on the darkened stair.

He lit the fire which was laid in the grate, but once more he found his room filled with the evil quality of emptiness, of conscious loneliness.

The day had been golden but the evening had had the melancholy of autumn. He knew there would not be many more days on the river; not for long would the nights permit that drifting downstream with her, darkly mysterious and silent at his side.

Came a tap at his door.

A tap which was no tap of Mrs. Hollyer or of Emily, the maid. A tap which his beating heart knew to be hers. She was standing there when he opened the door, the landing dark behind her.

"Would it matter really if I came in for just half an hour?" she asked. She spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, but he saw her white face sharply against the background of darkness.

"Do!" he said, striving for that same matter-of-factness but striving in vain. "I'm horribly lonely here."

She came in slowly and sat in the chair he pushed to the fire for her. She sighed a little as she did so, and leaned back with her elbows on the arms of the chair and her finger-tips meeting in front of her, and regarded him quietly over the finger-tips. She had changed the frock she had worn on the river and was dressed in one of brown taffeta; her beautiful arms showed dimly

through brown ninon sleeves. Her eyes were brigher than Kennedy had noticed before; they sparkled darkly.

"I'll make you some coffee!" he said, a little frightened of her contemplation.

"I don't want it," she said. "But I should like to see you make it and I will drink some if you do."

"Then I will," and he produced a little machine he had acquired and in a methodical way set out to make the beverage. He produced a tin of coffee from behind his books and, from some equally inappropriate storing place, a tiny coffee service in Japanese ware which his mother had given to him. She watched him gravely, once or twice a quiet smile, a quiet enigmatic smile, flitted across her face.

Afterwards he sat on the hearth-rug at her feet and she watched the firelight playing on his brown face.

"How old are you, Maurice?" she asked suddenly.

"Twenty-four, child . . . and you? It's funny we never asked each other before."

"How old do you think I am?" she asked.

"About my own age, I should say."

"You dear!" She leaned forward and, for the second time in his life, she kissed him.

As suddenly she rose to go, although she had not been there even the half-hour.

She had kissed him on the cheek and the kiss was a strange one. He could not tell just where her lips had touched him. He was not quite certain of things, but he was clear that he did not want her to go, did not himself want to remain, if that quality of sinister emptiness were to come back to his room.

"Please!" he said. "Please . . . if you knew how horribly lonely I am you would not go . . . how I want you."

She stroked his brown hair.

"You English boy," she whispered with words which just reached him, and at once his arms were round her holding her yielding body to his. He was kissing her as he had never before kissed any one, kissing her mouth and eyes and hair. She was limp, almost inert in his arms. Her lips were slightly parted and her eyes were closed. Her breath came in little gasps. Kennedy had never in all his life held a woman in his arms, so, and was filled with a distrust of himself, half wild fear and half wilder hope.

"Maurice!" he heard her passionate whisper, and felt her heavy in his arms.

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The next evening there was a note from her. Mrs. Hollyer had placed it conspicuously apart from the two letters which had come for him by post. She did not approve of the intimacy which she noticed had sprung up between her two boarders. Permanencies should not be trifled with by the Professionals however charming the latter. But landladies—particularly those who keep digs for the "Profesh"—are tolerant beings.

He knew that it was from her although he had never seen her peculiar writing before.

"DEAR BOY," (she had written)

"I shall not see you again although even as I write I love you, I think, more than I have ever loved any other man. I am leaving Mrs. Hollyer to-day.

"First, you have been splendid. You and another man have almost revived my faith in men. All these weeks you have treated me as a human being and not as a *woman*. I love you for it. You are surprised after last night? You have much to learn yet, Maurice.

"And all the time I have known of the tight grip you were keeping on yourself, you quaint baby! I'm not

laughing at you, Maurice, and though once or twice I wanted you to make love to me, I'm glad you didn't until last night.

"That was my fault.

"I know you think you're in love with me, but you aren't really. This letter keeps on getting a twist in it as if I were laughing at you. I'm not, *really*. It would not have done for you to fall in love with me. We're in different worlds, worlds which are getting farther apart.

"I'm older than you think, Maurice, and (I want you to know) I've got a baby. He's a beautiful baby and I go to see him in the country. I'm going this next week-end. But all this is outside your world although I wanted you to know. You see now why you couldn't fall in love with me.

"I know you think you are, but don't worry. Love goes. I *know* it, and sometimes it leaves a bitter taste in a woman's mouth, but it's different with men. It won't in yours. In a few days you'll look on this as a lucky escape—and it is.

"You've been so splendid all through—that chaperoning of me from the Junction every evening. It is funny, dear. I've been quite safe in tenth-rate music-halls over public-houses . . . I've been in places ten times worse even than those. Still, I loved you for it, and I should hate myself if I had done you any injury. You big English boy . . . some lucky girl is waiting for you somewhere, some girl who has had better chances than me or has made more of them. Be good to her, Maurice.

"I want you to forget last night. I meant it never to happen—until last night. But think sometimes of those nights we have had on the water, when you sat a little

away from me and quoted poetry. I shall often think of them.

"You are not to attempt to see me at the Imperial.

"Good-by, Maurice, and good luck.

"Your

"EVIE."

His face pictured many emotions as he read and re-read the quaintly-written letter. It bore all the marks of hurry and in places was hardly decipherable. It was written on cheap paper.

Afterwards he sat with it limply in his hand. The whole romantic superstructure he had built up toppled down as the meaning of her words sank into his mind. He was more acutely miserable than he had ever been in his life. It was a first love suddenly without the boundless hope inherent in such love. The long days on the river were over. No more would he wait in the tunnel at the Junction watching the people pour down the steps. No more of those walks through echoing, empty streets.

He read the letter yet again. He must not go to the Imperial. She had closed the one avenue open to him, for, as she well knew, he would comply with her request.

And yet he was conscious, acutely, exclusively conscious, of a dull longing for her, for the kindly mocking of her dark eyes.

He attempted to reconcile the letter, with all its hints at a sordid and disappointed life, with the girl he knew, with whom he had shared those gloriously innocent days on the river. He failed, as he was bound to fail.

He realized after a time that she had ceased to exist as far as he was concerned, that she had deliberately stepped out of his life.

His evening meal remained untouched in front of him, so poignant indeed may be the ending of one's first love.

"Ain't you feeling well, Mr. Kennedy?" a startled Mrs. Hollyer asked half an hour or so later.

"No," he said miserably . . .

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

He shook his head.

CHAPTER NINE

THE fitting of Evie Tierney from Mrs. Hollyer's marked the end of the summer for Kennedy. He imagined it was the end of all things, so persistent a memory was the girl who had gone, so great his desire for her. Life seemed to have become an echoing void, work grotesque and futile. The recurrent thought in which Evie Tierney was associated with the sordid life at which her letter had hinted, was almost physically painful.

He went no more to the river; the lengthening shadows above Glover's Island without Evie by his side would have maddened him.

Books he found had lost their grip on him, as they usually do when one needs them most. Remained only for him to wander about London streets hoping always that he would meet her. With conscious effort he kept away from the Imperial; but he discovered that she no longer caught her old train at Waterloo.

Sometimes he would haunt the streets around the theaters between six-thirty and seven-thirty on the off-chance of meeting her, and more rarely later in the evening, when the theaters had disgorged their multitudes.

Once he imagined he saw her slip by in a taxi. He was not certain, and he hugged his uncertainty, for the girl was not alone.

Inevitably, as he sauntered about, the women of the street—those derelicts of love—spoke to him. From dark corners soft voices came, and in the bluey-electric light everywhere he saw alluring, desperate faces behind mechanical, meaningless smiles, until the whole night seemed an evil, beckoning leer. Sometimes the garish

faces would get on his nerves horribly; tragic, vapid, passionless faces.

Since a night when he had felt a woman in his arms and seen all the rapture of abandonment in a woman's dark eyes, he had been more tolerant, more understanding of passion. Passion might be glorious, inspiring, but these unintelligent, sheepish faces with their ghastly passionlessness, blonging to some obscene world of creeping things. Still more so did the old men who haunted that part of the town.

Often, shuddering, he would turn away, and not even the possibility of meeting Evie when she left the theater would keep him there. Frequently on such nights he would look up Bateman whom he had told about Evie.

"You look white, Kennedy," Bateman said one evening, when his visitor had settled down into the low, comfortable chair by the fire.

"White? I'm sick. I've been hanging about on the offchance of meeting her . . . and all around me were other women . . . pah . . .!"

"Yes . . . it *is* rather a cesspool," Bateman said. "Still in a Society where everything has its price and where people are under the impression that they must live, these things are bound to be. The whole question is an economic one, not a moral one. At any rate, it's better to be disgusted with it like you are than attempt to sentimentalize it away. You know the verse:—

"Laughing eyes have the girls of London,
Eyes that smoothe the dead scruples down,
Eyes that hold secrets as old as London,
Sad, mocking glances of blue and brown.
Warm, wild looks have the girls of London,
Sweethearts of you, and me, and the town."

Not bad stuff, simply wildly untrue. The Street of the Sorrows is the dullest place in the world."

"Yes, I know," said Kennedy, wearily.

"You're letting that young woman get on your nerves, my lad. It isn't the women who bother you—they were there before you came and will be here when you have gone—it's one woman. It's always *one* woman when a man is upset."

"And I've heard you say that the difference between one woman and another didn't matter!" retorted Kennedy.

"So I did, and so I do. When one is in love, one is not normal and the difference is absurdly exaggerated. It is a device of Dame Nature—one of many devices—whereby the race is perpetuated. Why it should be perpetuated is beyond me. If it comes to that, dogs and horses are in many ways preferable."

"But what am I to do?" asked Kennedy.

"There's nothing you can do!" Bateman said.

"It doesn't seem fair that a girl should come into one's life, like that, and then just go."

"Things aren't fair. She was striving desperately to be more than fair when she wrote that note. She's a jolly, good woman, really, whatever she may be in the conventional sense. She's capable of passion, anyway. . . ."

"But . . . I know it seems childish, Bateman, . . . but life seems hopeless, pointless without her."

"We have all felt like that," Bateman replied gravely.

"I have, on several occasions."

Kennedy frowned at imagined flippancy.

"It is so, Kennedy," Bateman went on. "Man's capacity for love is almost infinite. It may be different with a woman, but sometimes I'm inclined to doubt even that. It all comes down to the basic thing . . . equality. Love is one of the few natural things which brings into being a fictitious inequality among people.

I remember you were once amazed that your sister placed the very ordinary young man she married on a pedestal. In her eyes he had qualities and advantages over all others of his kind. You were rightly amazed because in your eyes he was just an average specimen of his type. Love triumphantly ignores the great fact of equality, the fact that the difference between one decent person and another doesn't amount to *that*." Bateman snapped his fingers.

"You seem to know an awful lot about woman," Kennedy said, a little skeptically.

The other laughed, the skepticism not lost on him. "It is a case of the looker-on," he said. "There's one thing about women," he went on, "they have a keener grip on reality than we have. Apart from any peculiar functions of theirs in the race, I mean. Most women consciously or unconsciously know that happiness is the great end in life. Men fritter away their time seeking after power and wealth and so on, in the main non-essentials. And women are wiser or luckier than we, because they can find happiness in simple things. Most of them can, anyway, and exceptions don't matter."

"The women I saw to-night?" Kennedy asked.

"They are failures as women . . . the exceptions. They have abandoned or been cheated out of the simple things. By the way, talking of the simple things and happiness, do you know 'A Forsaken Garden,' Swinburne's?" Bateman always introduced a poem he meant to read with that "By the way" of his.

"No," said Kennedy. "Won't you read it?"

"You know perfectly well that I shall," Bateman said with a smile. "But you'll like it. I think you'll find it tunes with your mood."

He took down the dark blue volume and read. Kennedy settled down to listen, moved, as he always was,

by the exquisite rendering Bateman gave of any verse he read.

He made an end of the poem, but some of the words remained with the man who listened.

"Did he whisper?

And men that love lightly may die—but we?
And the same wind sang and the same waves whitened
And or ever the garden's last petals were shed
In the lips that had whispered, the eyes that had lightened,
Love was dead."

"Great stuff that," Bateman said inevitably, when he had finished. "A limited amount of meaning, my son, but glorious music. "A ghost of a garden fronts the sea" . . . magnificent line. He could write, could Mr. Swinburne. Funny looking chap, though. I once saw him drinking Bass."

And so for perhaps two hours they talked, with here and there some poem or other which Max Bateman read.

Kennedy walked most of the way home. Contact with Bateman's refreshing, antiseptic personality always soothed him, calmed him. Life ceased for the moment to be painted in such crude, hard colors. He saw there were shades . . .

More than ever he valued the friendship, delicate and delightful, which existed between Batman and himself. He pondered over it as he walked.

Only partly could it be accounted for by the doubtful statement that opposites meet. The two men in any case had much in common; above all, Youth. In their widely different ways they both possessed a strong appeal to women, and although great divergencies existed in their mental outlook, there was enough of Mrs. Kennedy in her son to enable him to appreciate Max Bateman's subtler brain.

To a much greater extent than his friend, Kennedy

was the creature of environment. His life had been orthodox, regular; the background had consisted of the vaguely disturbing influence of a mother who loved him. Bateman was wayward, unstable (by every standard of Mansfeld Road anyway). He had chosen deliberately, in preference to the life which would normally have been his, a life which, though it conformed to his own, and personal, moral code, was in the opinion of those with whom he had been brought up, not only unconventional, but dangerous and wrong.

It is typical of the peculiar friendship between them that Kennedy was not converted to the political faith of his friend. When they were alone Bateman—incorrigible propagandist though he was—made no effort to influence Maurice's opinions. The odd attraction between them was on a different plane; politics—vital though they were to Bateman—did not intersect this plane.

It was late that evening when at last Kennedy reached Mrs. Hollyer's silent house. He entered his room—the room in which he had last seen *her*—and sank into the arm-chair. He shut his eyes in the darkness, as if to exclude her; but in the increased blackness he saw only her dark eyes, eyes which looked into his with a yearning and a passion which set his blood racing.

Would he never get over that terrible want of her?

In his heart he said he would not; that all life held for him was the bitter memory of what had gone.

This was sheer nonsense as every man over fifty could have told him.

Sheer nonsense, yes. But the poignancy and anguish of youth in love is the best thing in the world. And what would not the old men give, when the chastening years have brought disillusionment and dulled their intelligence and their capacity for emotion, for that same poignancy?

CHAPTER TEN

FOR a short time after Evie Tierney had disappeared Bateman was nervous about his friend. He knew the thousand subtle devilries which exist in London, and to a degree, he knew the strength of the appeal they made to a man who imagined that he has come to the end of all things because dark eyes smiled no more. He understood because he was young, and not touched by the decay which comes with complacency and age.

It was in the days when Shaw was still treated with quaint seriousness, and inevitably Kennedy and Bateman went to the Shaw plays. They heard clever Mrs. Pat use the terrible word which Ireland's noblest product had put into her mouth; the word which shocked Surbiton. The audience always amused Kennedy, no matter how dull the play. Maddeningly superior gentlemen from Golders Green, who had the Adam's apple and the thin hungry look of the Reformer, were in the pit with the female of their kind. These latter were usually in sloppy frocks of the colors vaguely spoken of as Artistic, and were very Intense indeed. Bateman was always reverential at a Shaw play.

The nervousness which made Bateman take his friend to Shaw plays soon left him, however, for in the main he had been right about the impermanency of grief. Not a little to Kennedy's surprise he found that the insistence of the memory was not quite so evident as the weeks went by. He was sometimes a little ashamed when he remembered that he was forgetting. Certain it is

he ceased to haunt the streets about the theaters, and to open up other avenues out of himself. It was Bateman who suggested most of them, clever Bateman with that understanding which is the genius of friendship.

"You ought to write, Kennedy. You'll become a Civil Servant if you don't, and it's a horrid fate."

"I *am* a Civil Servant," Kennedy said, seriously.

"Yes, but you'll get it worse if you don't keep your brain agile."

"Hang it, it's a profession not a disease!" said Kennedy.

"Anyway, you should write," persisted Bateman. "I'm certain that you can. Why not write a descriptive article about the meetings on Clapham Common and send it to . . . to . . . the *Daily News*, say. I never liked the paper,"

Kennedy laughed, but a few days later did as Bateman had suggested, and sent the article to the *News* which promptly returned it. He read it again when it came back and found it good. He was positive it was good and he sent it out again, this time to the *Chronicle*, which exhibited the same deplorably bad taste as the *News*. He read a descriptive article in the *Chronicle* the very morning his own came back which was not half as good. He was certain of it.

Then he read it to Bateman, who listened gravely.

"Yes, it's good," Bateman said. "But you need practice, facility. Why not drop in at a Police Court? There's excellent copy to be found there which you might work up into Feminist articles for the *New Age*, or the women's papers."

So on a morning to a Police Court went Kennedy, imbued with the amazing enthusiasm of the very early stages of writing. But he had chosen an unfortunate day. The cases were mainly drunks and debts. Noth-

ing to work up. He went again, and this time there was a case which interested him. A man had stolen a purse from a woman's flat, and the woman had been forced reluctantly to admit the reason why he was in her flat. The fat smile which passed over the faces of the respectable men in the Court sickened Kennedy and he gave up Police Courts, as a source of copy, for all time.

Then quite accidentally he stumbled up against an idea whilst he was shaving. It was suddenly in his mind and that evening he wrote it.

"Try the *New Age*, with it" Bateman said, after he had suggested one or two improvements. "The editor's a decent chap, anyway."

To the *New Age* went the sketch—it was too slight to be a short story—and in a day or so, to Kennedy's wild delight, a queer yellow letter came from the editor, stating that he liked the sketch and might use it. The *New Age* was a propaganda paper and no payment could be offered.

Kennedy had not expected payment—the article had been too easy for such expectations—and in the fullness of time it appeared with Kennedy's name printed both underneath it and in the index.

It was the first time Kennedy had achieved print and the result was a species of subtle intoxication. Whenever he had a day away from the office he haunted those places where copy is supposed to lurk, particularly the kind of copy he wanted for the *New Age*. He wrote several other articles, which met with no particular success, and after a while the enthusiasm died down.

Other enthusiasms followed, fanned by Bateman. He even joined the Fabian Society of which Bateman was a persistent member. He attended one meeting, but as he disliked the women he found there—and it seemed

mainly women—it was particularly short-lived enthusiasm.

One Saturday in November Esther Pensimmon, Fanny Huggett, and the two men went to Richmond. It was Saturday and the quaint little town (quaint in spite of its buses and meretricious, modern tea shops) was full of people.

They watched the old Thames from the Terrace.

"It's a pity Twickenham can't be blown up," Miss Pensimmon said. "It completely spoils that part of the view."

"A drastic remedy!" Kennedy hazarded with a smile.

"I think most remedies are," she said, and without further words she turned away.

At the entrance to the Park, Miss Pensimmon passed through, but Kennedy held open the gate for a tall, fair girl who glanced at him casually as she thanked him. For perhaps two seconds their eyes met and for possibly twenty Kennedy was looking at her, but even after he had rejoined Miss Pensimmon, who was waiting inside the gates, the memory of the fair girl remained with him.

He was amazed that a face flashing into his ken, and out, should so disturb him. He remembered with absurd clarity how a wisp of hair nearly covered the left ear; and how the tip of the ear showed. The hat had been a tiny hat, apparently made out of bluey-black feathers; it fitted close to her head.

"I really don't think you're listening to what I'm saying, at all," Miss Pensimmon complained. Her words broke in on the fresh, pleasing memories; it was as if Miss Pensimmon had projected herself between Kennedy and the girl who had so suddenly tinged his imagination.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Pensimmon. I just noticed a face in the crowd which . . . eh . . . reminded me of some one I knew years ago." It was a lie and he was not quite sure why he had lied.

"Yes. It's odd what tricks a passing face will play with one," she said, and then she went on blandly with what she had been saying.

"Oh *rather*," he said vaguely, in reply to a question from his companion, and then pulled himself up. It was really too absurd to think further about a face that had passed in the crowd.

A little way in the Park they waited for the others. Miss Pensimmon had never found her companion so dull; she told him so.

The four sat awhile on a seat under an ancient elm, but it was a chilly day. After walking round the spinney, which in the spring is a blaze of rhododendrons, they turned back towards the town. They had tea in a tea-shop half-way down the hill.

The talk turned to the forthcoming general election. Kennedy was apathetic; they all seemed very much alike to him: politicians. Fanny hoped that the Labor people would put up a good show. Miss Pensimmon was quietly bitter and spoke of supporting a certain politician who was an avowed Feminist. Max Bateman was fiercely, aggressively enthusiastic. It was obvious that he meant to spend himself to the last ounce of energy in support of the Socialist candidates.

"I shan't stay in London," he said. "The Cockney is politically hopeless. I'm going to the north. You'll see very little of me for six weeks. The People have a real chance at last, A Real Chance," he emphasized.

And then Bateman became thoughtful and detached and it fell to Kennedy to rescue the party from the threatened despondency. He had a happy knack some-

times of talking the veriest nonsense with an elaborate seriousness which was quite effective. Nothing he said amounted to wit, but he succeeded in amusing his companions, and in rescuing Bateman from thought.

"You are an old fool!" Bateman said at last. His black mood had been shaken out of him and he became a part of the atmosphere which Kennedy had created.

The election drew near and Max Bateman disappeared into the great industrial centers of the north, where he imagined he would find a more intelligent electorate than in London. It was characteristic of him that he sent no intimation of his departure to either Kennedy or Esther Pensimmon. The latter learnt it from Fanny, and Kennedy from the landlady at Bateman's rooms.

"He's gorn, sir," she said. "His rent is paid up for two months in advance and no letters to be forwarded. A strange gent. Still, strange or no, he is a gent, and that's more than you can say for most of 'em nowadays."

"Eh . . . yes . . . thank you," and Kennedy hurried away.

Maurice Kennedy was wholly unable to understand or to sympathize with Bateman's whirling enthusiasm. To him it was a matter of little moment what men went to Westminster. The result was apparently the same, as far as he could see. He was vaguely a Liberal, and if he had had a vote he would probably have voted for the Liberal candidate for the constituency in which he lived. He had not, however, bothered to obtain a vote.

He listened at a few meetings at street corners when London at last drifted into electoral excitement, and he was amazed at the passion displayed. Men became excited and abusive; they shouted; here and there they

came to blows. The hoardings were plastered with bills urging one to vote for this person or that, and everywhere, as far as Kennedy could see, men of all political parties were engaged in clouding the various issues which the unhappy voters had to decide. There was little decency in the wretched business, but none knew that it was to be the last election before the greatest war of all time.

On one occasion he interrupted a speaker who was dealing with a subject with which Kennedy was conversant. The man garbled the case horribly and his dishonesty was patent to Kennedy. But poor Maurice was howled down and elbowed out of the crowd. It was the only active part he took in the election.

One evening he met Esther Pensimmon in the Strand. She was looking into the bookshop near King's College when he found her, and she was apparently pleased to see him. They walked along together. His way lay over Waterloo Bridge, and instead of her getting a tram he suggested that they should walk together as far as Vauxhall. On the way the talk turned to Max Bateman and he learned several things about him. It transpired that Miss Pensimmon had been at one of the Women's Colleges at Cambridge, and it was there that she had met Max. He came of what Miss Pensimmon called "a good family," but she knew practically nothing about his people.

"I wish I knew where he was," she said. "Fanny is not certain even. He's not strong enough really for this kind of thing."

"He'd be better married," said unsuspecting Kennedy.

"Some one to look after him, you mean?" asked Miss Pensimmon.

"Yes," answered Kennedy, innocently.

"And you think that that is a satisfactory life for one human being to lead, to look after another?"

Kennedy knew that he had put his foot in it, but he disliked the bitterness in his companion.

"I do," he said. "I'm certain that an enormous number of women would be happy in so doing, particularly for a man like Bateman. He's worth while, anyway.

"The particular man doesn't matter, and even if women could be found to embrace that kind of thing, it is because their economic position is such that they are forced to it."

"Really, I hardly know how to reply to you. You are so utterly wrong. There is such a thing in life as *natural affection*. If a woman loves a man—and even yet women do love men—nothing would give her greater pleasure than to 'look after him,' I'm certain of it. Possibly I'm a sentimentalist, but my belief is held by the overwhelming majority of your sex as well as my own."

"Yes. You are a sentimentalist. Most men are, I notice, particularly when they have to justify the kind of thing you are justifying . . . in their hearts women are rarely sentimental. They are too near reality."

"Ah, well. We don't see eye to eye," said Kennedy complacently. The phrase annoyed Miss Pensimmon.

"We don't!" she said shortly, but immediately afterward her manner changed. "It's little use arguing," she said, and for the rest of the way to Vauxhall they talked quite pleasantly.

Kennedy adjusted his swinging walk to keep in step with her. Once or twice she glanced up at him—he was a head taller, and the suggestion of power, of sheer physical strength, appealed to her. But she crushed the feeling down. It was just that physical strength

which had resulted in the subjugation of her sex, she told herself.

But none the less occasionally she still glanced up at the man by her side.

It was certainly quite pleasant to be with him. She noticed that girls who passed them glanced at him . . . there was a certain unhallowed satisfaction in it which was not seemly in a Feminist.

They parted at Vauxhall, and on reaching home Kennedy found a letter from Fanny Huggett awaiting him. Bateman had broken down and returned to town. Fanny wanted Kennedy to look him up at once. She said he was very "down."

The next evening found him at Bateman's.

"He's wore hisself out," was the landlady's verdict, and the Bateman whom Kennedy found upstairs was but the pale ghost of the Bateman who had gone north a few weeks before.

"I've crocked," he announced. "Damned bad luck. Too much work."

"You shouldn't do it," Kennedy remonstrated.

"What do I matter? What does anything matter save the cause?" Bateman demanded, and his pale face lit up with enthusiasm. "It's been a great fight . . . the Conservatives are, on the whole, the bigger liars, but I think the Liberals are the more dangerous. But it was good to *feel* the meetings. There is no excitement in life so exhilarating as feeling that one is moving a vast hall full of people. . . . And we did move them. Gradually they are *seeing* . . . there's a long fight, but gradually the light is coming."

"You lie down, Max, and don't talk so much. You're jolly ill and don't you forget it. You'll be no blinking use to the Cause—whatever that is—if you're dead. I know all about martyrs. . . . I think martyrs are the

most tedious and annoying people on earth. They always deserve to be killed. I'm going to read to you if you feel up to it."

"Please! My eyes are groggy to-day. The doctor said I wasn't to read. I was to keep cool, he said. The ass. . . ."

"He seems a very good doctor from his advice. Now be quiet and I'll read some R. L. S. to you."

He read the opening chapter of *Virginibus Puerisque*, and the even, flowing, beautiful prose soothed Bateman.

The reading was interrupted by the arrival of Fanny Huggett.

She was anxious and nervous and for awhile Bateman was amused by the efforts the two made for his benefit.

When Kennedy went Fanny accompanied him to the door.

"What do you think of him?" she asked, when they had left him.

"He's very weak. He's overtaxed his strength," Kennedy said.

"I'm worried . . ." she said nervously.

"He hasn't very much comfort in these digs. The landlady is good, of course, but after all. . . ." He did not complete the sentence and Fanny made no reply to it.

Three weeks later Kennedy was present at the marriage of Fanny and Bateman in the little Registry Office in Westminster.

It is an exceptional woman who can resist a man when he really has need of her.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WITH the end of May came the river.

In the days which preceded the great upheaval, and to a lesser extent even to-day, there is an air, an atmosphere on the water which is not so insular as that of the rest of our tight little island. It contains an element of gayety and color which is not quite English and, what is much more fascinating, an element of risk which is even less English. Certain it is that circumspect parents dislike their daughters to be on the river after sundown; so much so indeed that a tradition has grown up among the daughters that to be on the river after dusk is among the things which are *not* done. Which means in this twentieth century that the daughters are not *obtrusively* on the water after dusk has deepened into dark. Which means . . . but this is a digression.

Kennedy had made many friends on the river. One can.

Among the people whom Kennedy had come to know—the knowledge was not of his seeking—were a mother and daughter. The mother was matronly and corpulent, with a large, smooth, heavily amended face, the daughter, allowing for the difference in their ages, obviously belonged to the same type. She would inevitably be one day like her mother and already was an adept at improving on nature's handiwork in her own person.

Kennedy met them one afternoon at tea-time.

He and the Batemans were moored at the lower end of Eel Pie Island, and the next morning was occupied by the mother and daughter; up to that moment they were unknown to the hapless Kennedy.

Tea came, and it transpired that Fanny had omitted the one thing needful . . . tea; consternation resulted, but it was dissipated by the mother.

"May I lend you some tea, Mr. Kennedy?" she said. How she knew his name he never knew, unless she had overheard Bateman address him.

"Eh . . . thanks so much!" Kennedy said, more or less effectively, hiding his surprise at her method of addressing him.

The tea was handed over, and the meal fructified.

That was all, but on that little all the mother and daughter based an acquaintance and friendship—in the intensive culture of which they were adepts. The next time he was on the river they hailed him as he passed, lady-like hails, just a fluttering of a hand from the mother and a momentary smile—a raising of the eyebrows and a puckering of the lips—from the daughter, but in the hails was a certain familiarity, an easy familiarity such as might be expected in friends.

He was a little surprised, returned the hails with a stiff little bow (he was punting) and went on.

On a day some weeks later he was alone. Tea was at hand and he disliked tea alone, which was human and understandable in him. From across the water came a cheery hail and he looked up to find the punt of the mother and the daughter bearing down on him, as inevitable as night.

"Every mooring is taken," said the mother, after greeting him. "Do you mind, Mr. Kennedy, if we moor alongside your punt for awhile. Dear Agnes" (so that was the daughter's name, he might have known!) "Dear Agnes is so tired."

He was not able to see if they lied as to the moorings, but Dear Agnes was certainly not perceptibly tired. A little languid, perhaps, but then she always was languid.

Kennedy rose to assist them, there being no alternative. He felt in his bones that he was going to hate both Agnes (Dear Agnes!) and the mother, but since they had lent him tea he could do no less.

It was clear to Agnes that he was a river man from the way he moored their punt. She said so, with a little wayward glance into his eyes, a clear, girlish, blue little glance.

"Isn't it a *beautiful* day!" the mother hazarded.

It was.

"I don't think that weather is ever *quite* so perfect as on the river," Dear Agnes said intelligently.

Kennedy made an acquiescing noise. It was obvious that he had to talk.

"It is fine," he said, looking around in an inane way as if he had not noticed the weather before.

"What about tea?" asked the mother. She was obviously a sensible lady about her meals, at any rate. And that is to her credit. She conveyed the impression that she thoroughly enjoyed her *food*.

"Perhaps Mr. Kennedy would join us, mother?" Dear Agnes suggested modestly.

"We shall be very pleased!" the mother asked, faintly interrogatively.

And then, without waiting for a formal acceptance, the daughter commenced to unpack the tea-basket.

Kennedy stirred himself and lit the stove. He resented being dragged in like this, but the mother and Dear Agnes were quite irresistible. Together they were an amiable avalanche, and the helpless Kennedy was pressed into an outwardly enthusiastic co-operation in the scheme.

After all, it was a much better tea than he had provided for himself.

Conversation stirred under the benign influence of

the meal and the mother was reminiscent. She deplored the conduct of people on the river of late years and never, it appeared, allowed Dear Agnes on alone. Not that Agnes wished to be on alone, of course; she was thankful that Agnes was not a modern girl, in the unpleasant sense of the word. The old-fashioned virtues, mocked at as they were, were still of paramount importance.

The mother repeated the phrase, "paramount importance," as if it had a *flavor*.

"Quite so!" said Kennedy vaguely.

Dear Agnes wondered if Mr. Kennedy were musical.

He had little "executive ability," he assured them truthfully. "You ass!" he said to himself silently, "executive ability!"

"But you *like* music?"

"Of course," he replied, a little tactlessly since he emphasized the words.

"Didn't you think *Chopin* wonderful?" Dear Agnes purred.

He did.

The mother preferred ragtime, "frankly."

"Something with a tune in it that one can get hold of," she went on. "Of course," (why, "of course," he wondered) "Dear Agnes is *really* musical. She does play ragtime occasionally, to amuse Mr. Robertson and me."

So that was their wretched name. And there was a Mr. Robertson! Kennedy knew perfectly well that there must in any case at one time have been a Mr. Robertson. Dear Agnes proved that, in spite of all Mrs. Robertson's amazing self-sufficiency. And yet it was hard to associate a live man with the mother and daughter. They probably made him live somewhere at the end of the garden.

So Kennedy's absurd thoughts ran on as Dear Agnes talked.

He was thinking of some cast-iron excuse to get away when his scattered wits were recalled with a jerk, for another punt had come up behind him and stopped on the far side of the Robertsons' punt. It contained a tall, fair girl, the girl into whose eyes he had once looked at the gates of Richmond Park.

"Hallo, Mrs. Robertson!" she said. "And Agnes. How are you?"

"Quite well," said the mother a little distantly, and then since she had to, she introduced Kennedy to the new-comer.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said briefly, "Miss Ward."

Miss Ward inclined her head in a little bow and Kennedy imagined a mischievous look in her eyes.

"And how is Mr. Robertson?" Miss Ward went on.

"In excellent health, thanks," the mother replied. Both she and her daughter had adjusted themselves since the new-comer's arrival.

A restraint had fallen on the gathering. Neither the mother nor Dear Agnes babbled so freely as before, but after the first awkwardness both of them were affability itself to the new-comer.

Kennedy said very little to Miss Ward, and he was annoyed with himself for his shyness.

The fair girl had hair the color of oat straw when the sun brings out the gold in it, the color which no dye yet discovered can produce in a woman's hair. In the river sunlight it was quietly beautiful. She wore it lightly braided round her head.

Her eyes were the right blue for the hair and when she laughed she used the whole of her face. A frank, English face, and a beauty which is supposed to be typically English. The sun had lightly touched her

with freckles, but she was the kind of girl in whom the suggestion of freckles is an improvement.

Kennedy fell to comparing it with another face, with a face which had stirred him deeply all those months ago.

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"Well, I must be getting along," Miss Ward announced, and Kennedy was jerked back from his reverie.

"Good-by!" Her collective glance embraced the mother and the daughter and Kennedy.

She pushed off with the ease of the good punter and deftly extricated her punt from two skiffs whose amateur propellers were in increasing difficulties. Kennedy watched the slim white figure gliding away from him, watched her easy poise and the apparently effortless way she urged her craft along. He was, for the moment, oblivious of his two companions.

"A nice girl," said the mother. "A very nice girl!"

"I think she's very beautiful. Don't you, Mr. Kennedy?" said Dear Agnes.

"Yes," said Kennedy frankly.

"She punts so well, too," went on Dear Agnes sweetly.

"I think it's such a pity that she has to go to town every day," said the mother. "It is spoiling her complexion, and I don't think she is as strong as she used to be."

"I must be getting on," Kennedy bluntly said, looking at his watch with uncomprehending eyes.

"We must be coming down, too," said Mrs. Robertson, cheerfully.

But Kennedy was meeting a man at Milham's boat-house upstream. It was a lie, but it served. He escaped.

He seemed to breathe more easily once he was away and he punted steadily upstream.

He waited awhile opposite the island, listening to the concert, and his wandering thoughts were suddenly riveted by a girl's white figure at the top of the steps leading to the hotel. She was standing looking down at a small motor-boat which she had just left. On the raft a man in flannels was helping the hotel servant to moor the motor-boat. At a glance he knew the girl. The poise of her body alone would have told him that it was Evie Tierney.

He stopped paddling in sheer amazement and his punt drifted downstream. He still watched the girl on the steps and he drew level again. The mooring completed, the man in the boat went slowly up the steps. His back was towards Kennedy, and at the top he paused. He turned after a few seconds and gave some instructions to the boatman on the raft below him. Kennedy saw his face clearly. It was Ronald Bateman.

Neither the man nor the girl had recognized him and he was glad. He watched them disappear into the hotel before he turned his punt downstream.

CHAPTER TWELVE

KENNEDY saw the fair girl on the river fairly frequently during the remainder of the season. Once or twice he was able to talk to her, but she was rarely alone; not infrequently she was accompanied by a sour-faced man whom she called Squidge.

Kennedy disliked Squidge.

Once he was moored near Glovers Island when the two passed him. The girl waved to him and went on upstream. He watched her until her white figure was lost round the bend below Hammerton's.

Later in the afternoon he punted upstream, but there was no sign of the other punt. He wondered what had become of it. He listened awhile to the concert at the island and then in the dim light of the autumn evening, he commenced to paddle down to the bridge.

He was deeply conscious, that evening of the peculiar melancholy which pervades the river on autumn evenings. The night is saturated with beauty; the prevailing tone is gray, gray water and a grayness of coming night which blends with the pearl-gray sky; the birds fly low, mournfully, and everywhere is the pungent, sweet smell of the green water plants. Boats are strangely silent.

He turned up the hill when he landed. In the Park, with the tender line of the horizon and the soft masses of the trees, his melancholy fell away from him. He walked round the big spinney, in the rapidly deepening evening, a magic wood, with mysterious distances and eerie caverns. Over Petersham a thin wisp of a moon

was faintly phosphorescent, a dainty, fragile, dream moon. He stopped awhile under an old oak—a wonderfully silent and dignified tree—and he looked through the drooping branches to the vague white clouds above. As he smoked he thought of Miss Ward's blue eyes and her quiet smile. He wondered what her Christian name was, and could not think of one which quite suited her. There were also other symptoms. . . .

Afterwards, in the safety of a motor bus, it struck him as a little strange that he should have been so miserable on the river. He also remembered that he was very hungry.

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A few nights later he came to Richmond again. He did not go on the water, but turned up the hill to the Terrace. He strolled up and down awhile, meaning to have a meal in the town and then walk again through the Park in the moonlight.

At the end of the Terrace he suddenly met the fair girl. She was alone and was watching the river below. She did not see him and for a second he hesitated before he went up to her.

"Good-evening, Miss Ward!" he said.

She turned sharply.

"Oh . . . Good-evening!" she said. "You startled me."

"It's a perfect view from here, I think," he said, lamely.

"Yes . . . I love it. I come up here sometimes if I've had a particularly busy day in town," she said. "There seems enough air up here!"

He was desperately anxious to be at ease, and envied her her detached composure.

"It was Reynolds's favorite view," he hazarded. "At least, so I've heard."

"The painter?"

"Yes."

"I wonder more people don't come," she said. "Around us are thousands of people who have been in London all day, and there are not a dozen in sight."

He was not certain whether she welcomed his talking to her. There was an aloofness in her which he found a little unsettling, a lack of interest, of poignancy.

They had been talking, perhaps, for a quarter of an hour, when she glanced at a tiny wrist watch.

"I must be getting down," she said. "I'm my own cook to-night," she added.

The question was how to ask her to have the evening meal with him.

He walked along by her side turning the matter over in his mind.

"I'm getting some kind of a meal in the town," he said. "I was on my way down when I met you."

"It's something of an achievement to have kept a hungry man from his food," she said, with that peculiar little laugh of hers which puzzled him.

"Oh, I'm not hungry," he said. "One must eat, though. Why not join me?" He had plunged suddenly, and struck out boldly. "I hate a meal alone, and you said just now that you had to prepare your own."

"And I rather hate meals which I have prepared myself," she said.

"Then you will!" he said. "I am glad. I simply hate a lonely meal."

They went into one of the cafés on the hill which he knew fairly well, and during the meal he found her an amusing talker. He also found that it was easy to talk to her.

It was not yet dark when they came out and Kennedy

suggested that she should stroll back to the Terrace with him as the moon would be coming up.

She agreed at once; he was to discover afterwards that she ordered her own life as she willed.

He talked to her of Bateman and his poetry. Thence, naturally, the talk drifted to books, on which subject Kennedy could talk quite well. They discovered mutual likes and dislikes; both hated Ibsen, for example, and laughed cheerfully at their own philistinism. . . .

Afterwards he walked back with her into the town and over the bridge. She lived half a mile or so from the bridge and he left her at her door.

"Good-by, Mr. Kennedy," she said, with a smile. "You have bridged over a lonely evening valiantly."

He was left with the impression that she had deliberately cut things off sharply, and, as he walked very slowly back towards Richmond, he pondered over the evening's happenings.

He was a little distressed by the way she had snapped things off at the end. Had she not done so, he might, he pondered, have asked her. . . . But he was extremely uncertain what he would have asked her.

Kennedy was on the river on each of the few remaining days of the season when there was any likelihood of the fair girl being there. But either she did not come or he missed her. He was very disappointed, for the couple of hours he had spent with her had deepened the impression she had had on him. However, she did not come, and the season came to its appointed end. Punts were stowed away in the arches and autumn deepened into winter.

Maurice Kennedy was not in love . . . he was certain of it. Yet, somehow, the fair girl seemed to have become part of the memories of the river and the summer.

In quiet moments a vision of sunlit hair and eyes of the only blue which blends with it, floated into his mind. He was not nervous about the memories, there was no longing ache in them as there had been in those other memories of his. Once or twice during the winter he went to Richmond and casually strolled up and down the Terrace and along the tow-path. Casually, there was no doubt. He never met her there, but since he was only there casually, he told himself that he was not disappointed.

He told Max Bateman about her once, casually.

Bateman listened to him carefully.

"She's a pretty girl, I suppose?" he asked.

"Oh, quite," said Maurice.

To which Bateman made no reply.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

KENNEDY called on the Batemans one evening in the late spring, hoping to find them disengaged and to take them to a theater. To his intense disappointment he found them out, and was faced with a lonely evening. After a solitary dinner at a little club of which both he and Bateman were members, he went into a music-hall, to which places he only went when he was lonely.

He glanced down the programme and, as he expected, it was very like the programme one always finds in music-halls. The first few turns were mildly amusing. The fifth turn was a famous comedian "and company" in a sketch entitled "Trespassers will be prosecuted," or some such inane title. Kennedy knew that comedian. He had a reputation for gagging and for mild, suggestive indecency which guaranteed him the salary of a Cabinet Minister. It was a sketch in which different people in a hotel made more or less amusing mistakes about bedrooms and other intimate personal things. It was amusing enough in its way, and though it certainly could do no good it probably did very little harm. Kennedy was sufficiently healthy-minded to render the thing innocuous as far as he himself was concerned, and he would have forgotten about it as soon as the curtain fell, but for one of the two girls in it being Evie Tierney. It seemed almost as if she were haunting him.

Her name did not appear in the programme; she was lumped with the "Company." He recognized her at once, in spite of her elaborate make-up. He was in the

circle and, as he knew, too far away for her to recognize him; it was as well, for he was certain that she would not have wished him to see her in that sketch. At the end, when the characters sorted themselves into the right rooms, she was in very considerable and calculated deshabille on the stage. She had, in her lines, to be the foil of the gagging comedian's indelicacies. It sickened Kennedy, the whole deplorable business was nauseating. He wanted to do immediate and bodily harm to that foul-minded comedian with his recurrent, meaningless endearments.

The curtain fell and was raised several times amid applause. A heavy-featured man behind him, who had made audible comments during the evening, expressed the opinion that the play was " 'ot stuff!" and at one interesting moment Kennedy had heard his thick sultry tones, "My *word*, she's a fine girl!" He wanted to rise in his seat and hit that heavy featured man.

The orchestra started again, and before Kennedy knew, the next turn was on. It was a ballad-singer who was singing a song about roses in some garden or other. Kennedy could not stand it, and went out into the cool, welcome night air. One could breathe there. He walked rapidly away from the theater, consciously, not wishing to meet Evie. The night cooled his agitated nerves, and he saw things in better perspective. He knew perfectly well that the sketch was no worse than a hundred others, that the comedian in private life was probably a morbidly respectable man—most comedians are. He knew that scores of girls that very night in London were playing in sketches not unlike the one he had just seen. But the knowledge of these things still left him with a fierce resentment that Evie was in such a sketch. After all, Evie Tierney was the girl who had spent those happy hours with him on the river, the girl

who had rushed away from him for the pathetic reasons of a woman who was in essence a good woman, no matter what she might be judged by the standards of Streatham.

As usual, when he was distressed, he turned his face towards the Batemans, but he found the little house still in darkness. It was not yet ten o'clock, but he went to Waterloo, and so home. He had told Mrs. Hollyer that he would not be in until late, and no fire was in his room. The landlady had gone to bed, and it was easier for him to do the same than to light a fire himself. In the darkness, before sleep came, he thought out the evening's experience. But gradually, imperceptibly, his thoughts left that evening and Evie Tierney, and the lights of the great theater, and he found himself thinking of another girl—a tall, fair girl utterly unlike Evie in every way.

He thought it rather curious and a little later he was in a dreamless sleep.

Occasionally, as the days went by, Evie Tierney flashed into his mind and gave him several bad quarter hours. He found, however, to his surprise that she had ceased to be personal to him as she had been in the old days when his life had for a time pivoted on her dark glances. His feelings were of the past, mere memories of emotion, devoid of poignancy. He wanted acutely to help her . . . but he wanted nothing in return, wanted no response to his interest in her. Which showed even to Kennedy that the old love was nothing but a remembrance, and his shock on seeing her on the stage nothing but the fitful stirring of ashes which had long been cold.

Save for this shock of seeing Evie Tierney, the winter slipped away without untoward happening. Kennedy lived the normal life of a bachelor of imagination and limited means, and found the life good. In those days—now so utterly remote—life moved easily, without

effort. One paid one's money, an astonishingly small amount of money usually, and what one wanted was there.

They were happy days. . . .

Once he thought he saw the fair girl on the top of a bus, but it was not until June that he spoke to her again. She was some distance upstream one afternoon as he came to the steps at the bridge. They were a maddeningly long time in getting his punt, and she was long out of sight before he started. He took his punt over the rollers at the lock to save time, and from the top of the rollers saw her turn into the quaint little stream above Teddington. He knew she had friends at one of the houses there and that it was useless to follow.

He moored his punt a few yards from the entrance and settled down to wait. It was quite an hour later when she reappeared and she was still alone. He drew alongside her a little way below the stream.

"Hallo!" he said, "I've been wondering where you were all these weeks."

"I like people to wonder where I am, Mr. Kennedy," she said, with a smile. "I've been away. I took a fortnight of my holiday very early this year."

"I've been down to Richmond quite frequently during the winter," he said; "I've never seen you, though."

"No? I'm in town a lot. I wonder you haven't seen me sometimes though. I shall be on the river fairly frequently for the rest of the season." She spoke with casual frankness and went on to talk of a play she had seen a few nights before.

She left him at the bridge.

He met her again a week later, but this time she was not alone. The serious and rather melancholy young man was with her. She waved pleasantly to Kennedy,

the dominant emotion in whose soul at the moment was a hatred of the young man who shared her punt. He was strangely disturbed at the thought of Miss Ward and the other man, the while he knew that his disturbance was absurd. The two who occupied his thoughts landed that evening just before he himself did, and he saw that the man accompanied her across the bridge in the direction of her home.

He found himself distorting and twisting the slender data at his disposal, in order to make up his mind exactly what was between them. Naturally, the more he thought the more uncertain he became, and it was a very mournful Kennedy indeed who ate his lonely meal at Mrs. Hollyer's house that evening. That wise woman diagnosed the symptoms which were all too evident in her boarder; Mrs. Hollyer did not like such symptoms in a permanency, but there was nothing that Mrs. Hollyer could do and she left her moody boarder to his own thoughts.

Most evenings, when the weather was at all possible, Kennedy went to Richmond during the next week or so. Occasionally he saw Veronica Ward—he had discovered that such was her name; but she was rarely alone. One Saturday he punted down again with her, but she was in her punt and he in his, a most disheartening arrangement when a man is in love, even when he does not admit the fact to himself. She talked on that occasion of certain Flannel Dances which were held on Saturday nights at Lumley House, which he gathered was a kind of club on the Middlesex side of the river near the bridge.

"You are fond of dancing?" he asked, although from the way she had spoken of the dance it was obvious that she was.

She nodded.

"I'm fond of anything which gives me a good time," she said flippantly.

"I should rather like to go to one of these dances," he said, "but it would mean going to my rooms first."

"As far as that goes, many people go straight in from the river. You can obtain a ticket from the Secretary if you are really keen about it. Mention my name to him if you care to. It's a very free and easy kind of place, but rather amusing."

After she had left him he puzzled a little over what she had said. It amounted almost to an invitation; at least he was fairly certain that she was not averse to his coming.

He called at Lumley House after he had obtained a meal in the town and he found to his surprise that it was an old country mansion tucked away among modern villa residences which stood in what had once been its grounds. He awaited the Secretary in a wonderful old hall which contained a fireplace of Flemish molding and a staircase which was grotesquely out of place in a London suburb. The Secretary was a still greater surprise, and was more out of harmony with Lumley House than the Club House was with its locality; a little ingratiating man, mainly calabash pipe and mustache, the faint, straw-colored, offensive kind of mustache.

"Are you the Secretary of the Club?" Kennedy asked, attempting to keep the surprise out of his tone.

"I am. I haven't the pleasure . . ." the Secretary began. He was the kind of man who would say, "I haven't the pleasure. . . ."

"My name's Kennedy. Miss Ward told me there was a dance on here to-night. I wondered if I might obtain a ticket."

"Sure!" said the Secretary with alacrity. "Any friend of Miss Ward's . . ." he had an annoying habit

of not finishing his sentences; and his pipe made gurgling noises.

"Three and six single, five bob double," he added.

"I'll have a single, please," said Kennedy.

"Like to look round the Club?" the Secretary asked cheerfully. "Most do," he added, without additional clearness.

"I should," Kennedy replied. "It's a very beautiful club-house."

"Not another like it for twenty miles round," the Secretary went on after a pause.

It was a wonderful old place and it contained some fine carvings. Kennedy was so impressed that he obtained a prospectus of the Club. The Secretary added another assertion to an already long list when he said that all the "best" people of the locality were members.

The dance was amusing. At first there was no sign of Veronica Ward, and Kennedy wandered about the lawn. He found that several river people whom he knew were there, and when at last Veronica came, he was engaged for several dances.

"So you've come!" she said, with a laugh. Most of the people there were in the clothes they had worn on the river, but she had changed into a black frock and her beautiful hair was carefully done. Her hair always was carefully done.

"Yes, I thought it might be amusing. I know several people here."

"I'm glad you've come. The man I usually come with is in Italy, and I loathe having no one. . . . What all this means is that you may have the supper dance, or rather the coffee-sandwich dance." As she was speaking, the orchestra—a piano, a fiddle, and a 'cello—commenced. The ball-room was at the far end of the building. "Come on," she said, "we'll have this dance, too."

She rather whirled him along, and he had no thought of resentment for she did it cleverly. He found himself dancing with Veronica Ward in his arms almost before he was quite aware of her presence. The dancing-hall—"ball-room" was perhaps a little too pretentious description—was octagonal in shape and was lined with oak panels. It was small, but every one there was out for a "good time," and no one worried. His partner danced beautifully; he could hardly feel her in his arms and she was quite different from the partners of the dances of other days at Wandsworth Town Hall.

Kennedy danced with several other girls before the next one with Veronica, but she focused his attention. Her black dress stood out clearly from the white figures around. His partners found him dull, and one of them, following his glance, spoke of Veronica.

"She is pretty, isn't she?" she said innocently.

"I beg your pardon," Kennedy said, and then, seeing that the girl by his side appeared to be amused, he added, "Yes, she is." The opinion of the young lady about Kennedy might have been interesting.

After his next dance with Veronica they sat out on the lawn. It was a warm evening and they found a seat remote from the house. Kennedy was not quite certain how they found it.

From where they sat they could see the moon coming up over Richmond and the lights of the buses passing over the bridge. Veronica had a long wrap—of soft silk—and in the soft moonlight she was vague and beautiful.

"It's a glorious night," Kennedy said cheerfully.

She nodded.

"May I smoke?"

"Please do."

She watched his face in the glow of the lighted match,

and an odd smile flitted across her own. He was lean and brown, with clear skin and eyes.

He turned sharply, meeting her waiting eyes, and until the match spluttered out they looked at each other gravely, as if each face was quite new to the other.

"Well? O scrutinizing one!" she asked, with a little laugh.

"You look very pretty in match-light," he said, and slipped his arm around her.

"Now, don't be foolish!" she said, but he kept his arm tightly round her waist and they went on talking as if it were not there.

The interval had gone amazingly quickly, and Kennedy went back to the other partners with a mind full of confused impressions of Veronica. There was a quality in her of calm coldness which was alien to every conception he had formed of women; most men by the time they have reached Kennedy's age have formed such conceptions and "knowledge" of women is based on them. He found the coldness a little unnerving; it made her difficult of approach.

The supper interval passed and later they again sat together on the seat under the old tree.

Kennedy pointed out that in the two hours since they were last there the moon's position had altered considerably. It was a more favorable opening than a remark about the weather, and Veronica spoke of the extraordinary use the Japanese have made of the moon in their decorative art. Kennedy seized her cue and talked of Art, the while he should have been grateful to Max Bateman, through whom came his knowledge of Art—with the majuscule.

Veronica sat looking out of the shade to where the moonlight flicked the water of the river with silver. Her hands were clasped around one knee, which was

raised slightly above the other, and she listened with obvious interest to her companion's talk.

"I like a man who can talk," she had said to him once on the river, and her phrase came back to his mind as he watched her dim profile.

He talked of this school and that, and this painter and the other, but in his heart he cared for none of these things. Veronica's blue glances held all the Art of which he had need and he longed to tell her so, to tell her that he loved her, that she mattered more than all the painters and all the paint they had ever wasted. But he talked interestingly of Art and said no word of what was in his heart and his brain.

And Veronica, who probably knew quite well what was in his heart, was rather relieved. Besides, she really was as interested in Art as ever any pretty woman is.

For a reason which, even in his own mind, was not clear, he did not attempt to put his arm round her again, although he knew that at most suburban dances it is considered quite the correct thing to do. On the lawn, in the moonlight, he had noticed other couples. Usually the man's arm was round his companion. . . . Kennedy felt that Veronica was different, and suddenly he saw that all this pawing was very unpleasant. . . .

He walked home with her after the dance.

"You know, I believe you could write, Mr. Kennedy," she said after a silence.

"That's very nice of you," he replied. "I have tried my prentice hand at it, but then most people have."

"You *look* rather as a writer might," she said, and as far as he could see she was serious. "I believe you *could* write," she added. The faint emphasis pleased him very much, as such things always do please a man.

The flat came all too soon, and Kennedy—a mass of impressions and memories and regrets—walked back to

St. Margaret's Station to find that the last train to Clapham Junction had gone. But he was in love, absurdly in love, so that he faced the journey home with equanimity. A stray bus took him as far as Richmond Bridge, and another as far as Barnes, on his way home. From Barnes he walked, and it was a very tired Kennedy indeed who at last reached Mrs. Hollyer's. Very tired, but insanely happy, for he was in love, and she had said that she really thought *he* could write, or perhaps it was that she really thought he *could* write—he was not certain of her emphasis, although he was positive that she had emphasized something.

Absurdly in love and absurdly happy, yet, if you come to think, every one really in love is in love absurdly. There is something absurd in the very nature of love, and extremely so in its expression. But always those in love, and frequently even those who are not in love, fail to see its absurd side, which perhaps is just as well. And in any case, if anybody—particularly a man—over forty-five sneers at love, even at the absurdities of love, there are three reasons why he should be shot or drowned.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN the days before the plunging of the world in the heart blood of youth, life in London was steadily becoming more complex. Broadly speaking, old men were powerful and young men and women were happy. Civilization had degenerated into the creation of new wants and their ingenious satisfaction. Nowhere had life become quite so involved or quite so interesting as in the relation between the sexes. Fundamentally the relation was as simple as ever it was; as of old the man hunted and the woman cooked (with necessary modification that was as true of the clerk in Streatham as it was of the ancient Briton). But in those pre-war days men and women had become emotionally analytical . . . they even attempted to analyze love, the quaint dears! Everywhere were sex plays and problem novels, and everywhere crude sex was emphasized, not the least by the "emancipated" woman who cropped up about that time.

Kennedy was unfashionable, and puzzled by the complexity. Having fallen in love he did not become analytical, but asked the girl to marry him. He discovered the complexity then, however.

It was in the early autumn. He had met Veronica in town and they were back in Richmond early. It was a lovely night; the moon was creeping up over Petersham and the evening was saturated with a deep, wonderful blue.

"Come up into the Park for half an hour," he asked. "It'll be glorious up there."

"I should love to," she said. She had been in town all day and there was allurements in the mere sense of distance one can exercise in the Park.

They turned to the right inside the gates and walked across soft grass to the wood opposite. The night which drew on was faintly luminous, pivoting on the pale, beautiful, young moon. There was a hush in the air, a conscious stillness. The sounds of the day were dying with the day, and the soft subtle noises of the night were not yet. Both in their different degrees responded to the beauty which lulled the world around them. A tall man passed silently, a tall man with a beard, and followed by a bull dog which made the little grunting noises of its kind. In the depths of the wood some night bird called.

In all that beauty, in all that saturation of subtle color they met no one except the man with the bull dog. They walked in silence by the spinney, divinely attuned to the beauty in which they walked. They were children. There was that in the night, in the misty color of the night, which sweetened and youthened, and wiped from their souls the touch of London.

They rounded the wood and before them in blue mistiness were the Penn Ponds, ugly in daylight and disappointing, but in the witchery of the blue night touched with a faint magic beauty.

"*I say!*" said Kennedy, lost in sheer admiration.

"Isn't it gorgeous?" Veronica said. "Let's sit somewhere. I'm very tired!"

"There's a seat a little way ahead," he said. "In a clump of silver birch with the wood behind one, and all this—" he indicated vaguely the soft beauty of the evening in front.

They found the seat and Veronica sat down with a happy little sigh.

"Isn't it gorgeous?" she said again.

A silence came to them as it will to sensitive people in such a night. When they sat down he had not consciously meant to make love to her, but in that wonderful light her delicate profile was wildly beautiful and suddenly he was full of the need of her.

Her thoughts were lost in the blueness around, she was unconscious that his eyes were on her face; but the witchery of the night was stealing away from his soul and all his senses could grasp was the wistful beauty of the girl at his side, and his love for her.

Suddenly she turned to him and met his waiting eyes.

"I felt your eyes on my face," she said unemotionally.

"Yes," he said. "I've been looking at you for some time. You are very beautiful, Veronica, in this light."

"It's a wonderful light," she said, and turned away leaning a little forward, chin in hand.

He seemed full of wild thought which he could not put into words. He wanted to tell her that she was more beautiful than the night, that he loved her. He wanted, more than ever he had previously wanted, Max Bateman's gift of words. He was rebellious because of the amazing importance of words, not knowing that no man in love can express his thoughts to his beloved.

"I sometimes wish I were never going to see a town again, Maurice," she said. "Fancy sleeping with one's window opening on to this," her gesture took in the scene in front of them.

"You're happy in your work, Veronica?" he asked, and the surprise in his words showed her that he had not understood.

She shrugged her shoulders and made a little non-committal characteristic noise. He was oblivious of the effect of his words on her. Unconsciously he went on, when all the earth, when the night, the wisp of a virgin

moon shrieked to him to be silent, when the very poise of her tired body told him that the moment was not his opportunity.

"I love you, Veronica," he said, and there was sudden passion in his voice.

She sat back on the seat, startled by the intensity of his words.

"It's the night," she said, with a little defensive laugh. "The moonshine. It's got into your brain, Maurice. . . ."

"No, it's you, dear," he insisted.

He put his arm round her and held her nearer to him.

"It's funny," she said impassively, "but I'm not a tiny bit Romantic to-night, in spite of the wonderful night. I like being made love to usually, but you do it so clumsily. And besides, it really is too gorgeous a night to make love. I know that sounds priggish, but I was fitting bits of Chopin in with it all when I felt your eyes on my face."

Again he longed for Bateman's gift of words—those magic words which catch fleeting shades of thought, which carry exquisitely what one would convey. That he sighed vainly was proved by his reply.

"I can't think of anything else when I'm with you," he said, after which he relapsed into silence, his arm still around the girl at his side. He had yet to learn that there are times when a sensitive woman values silence in a man above all words. There was something unresponsive in Veronica which warned Kennedy to be silent. In the silence he heard the soothing noises from the spinney behind them, and once he imagined she leaned a little towards him.

Suddenly Veronica sat upright.

"We ought to change hats," she remarked, with a smile, "Cuddling on a seat in Richmond Park. I'm

surprised at you, Maurice! But you made me so thoroughly comfortable. . . .”

He took her arm as they walked homeward.

“I want you to marry me,” he said, as if no interval existed since he had last spoken of his love, as if indeed he had not spoken of it.

“I don’t want to marry any one,” she said, and he seized on the generality.

“Then it isn’t me particularly you object to?”

“I don’t object to you at all. . . . I like you. Oh, can’t you understand, Maurice? Marriage is such a risk for a woman, such a risk that you’ve no idea of it; and I simply won’t marry a man unless I just can’t help it, unless I *must* marry him. I have not met any man like that.”

“But most girls marry!”

“Yes. I know . . . and look at most marriages. I’ve thought the whole thing out long ago and my mind is quite made up. I’ve got my—I know it sounds horribly modern and how you hate it—but I’ve got my career. It’s been jolly hard work, harder, I think, than it would have been for a man, and I’m not going to throw it up unless something comes along worth all the world.”

“That means you’ll never marry, Veronica.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“I’ve no intention of settling down in some mincing little suburban road, with a man of whom I’m merely fond. You don’t understand. All the world seems to be conspiring to make a girl like me marry. Work is hard . . . and there are . . . forces. I suppose naturally one would marry, but life is not natural. It’s got too complex altogether. Men ask me to marry them—several have—and they have all regarded my point of

view as a personal grievance, as if I *ought* to marry them because they've fallen in love with me. Unless I really loved a man I think marriage would be intolerable. I know this all sounds horrid. . . ."

"I do understand, Veronica," he said. "At least . . . at least——"

"You *don't*, Maurice. No man can. You think I'm unwomanly and that's simply nonsense. I'd be a man's *squaw* if I loved him enough. . . ."

"I should love to have you to work for," he said, as if it were necessary to justify his point of view.

"Yes, I know," she said. "You are a dear boy, and I'm really most frightfully, frightfully fond of you; but I don't want to marry you. And I don't want you to go off in a huff and not come back."

"I suppose I ought to be satisfied," he said wistfully.

"If I loved a man and he told me frankly what I have just told you, I shouldn't get annoyed with him . . . at least, I don't think I should," she added.

"I'm not annoyed," he said, quickly. "Only sorry."

"For me?"

"Oh, Lord, no, Veronica, *you're* all right. For me."

"And *you're* all right," she mimicked his intonation, so that he laughed for all his seriousness.

"You're most frightfully hard to make love to," he complained, adopting her flippant tone.

"I'm not . . . really," she said. "I like being made love to, if the man isn't too deadly serious about it, and isn't going to fall head over heels in love with me. That means flirting simply though," she added thoughtfully.

"That's so," he said. "You *are* a flirt. I knew that."

"I think you're horrid," she said.

"Well, you said it first."

"That doesn't justify you in saying it. I'm *not* a flirt. I could easily have flirted with you if I had wanted to. Have I flirted with you? Now, come!"

"No!" he said, and at the quaint misery in his voice, they both laughed.

"You old silly!" she said, and he felt a new pressure on his arm.

They turned out of the Park and down the hill into the town. They got a bus at the bottom, and a little later that came to Veronica's flat.

"Well, good-by," she said. "I've enjoyed this evening—up to a certain point—more than I have any other since I don't know when."

"I haven't!" he said ruefully.

"Don't be a goat," she said, and he laughed in spite of himself.

He walked home very slowly that night, turning over in his mind odd phrases she had used, twisting expressions and building wild hopes on very slender data indeed, as men will when they are in love, or imagine themselves to be in love.

But the one thing in the night's talk which was significant, the one thing which was a clue to the girl and to the feelings which she harbored for him escaped him. *She had never flirted with him.* She had seized on the point and made him admit it. She had *never* flirted with him, she who was an adept in flirtation. If he thought of it at all, possibly in his miserable mood, he imagined that it was because she did not find him sufficiently attractive even to flirt with, that she simply hadn't bothered!

The which, as dear old Euclid—that romantic man!—would have said, is Absurd.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE flat to which Kennedy had taken Veronica after the unsatisfactory evening in the Park overlooked an open space which was an excellent suburban imitation of a meadow. It was a tiny flat; as its owner had put it, "A poor thing but mine own."

She had taken the flat when she had come to London, and had been in it five years. During that time she had waged a comparatively successful fight (with all the drawbacks and advantages of her sex and prettiness) in the profession she had accidentally chosen, and had become the "right-hand man" of the editor of the paper on whose staff she worked. He had learnt to rely on her tact and thoroughness and on that extraordinary mastery of detail which is the peculiar gift of women, and which often staggers the merely male mind. These qualities in her, and the grim necessity of success, enabled her to make a larger income than many men of possibly greater ability.

Her family had originally been a London one, and for practical purposes commenced in the eighteen fifties, when one Simon Ward founded it. It is obvious that there were other Wards before Simon, but no knowledge of them is extant; the alleged connection with "The Suffolk Wards"—of which Veronica's mother had been known to talk—being quite apocryphal.

Simon existed, at the time Kennedy fell in love with his grand-daughter, in one photo which, faded and indistinct, still shows his wiry side whiskers, his thin, hard,

trap-like mouth, and his shrewd, cunning little eyes; the clothes are quaintly Victorian; Simon is holding a book in his left hand and his right reposes on a pedestal at his side. Faded and indistinct, it is yet clearly the photo of a man doomed to succeed from the moment those little eyes opened on the world, and it also explains not a little in Veronica, even if it cannot explain her beauty.

In his person the Wards emerged from the vague mass of our ancestors: even from the photo one can imagine him pushing his way, going ahead with that slit of a mouth tightly shut, and his bright shrewd little eyes. It is certain that there was no Norman blood in him—or at least none of which he was aware; simple faith there was, a simple faith in money, and in his power to obtain—to “make”—money. The second of these was justified, for his building speculations were very successful.

Of money, all has long been said.

Simon died at fifty, to the relief of most people who knew him, particularly his relatives. Of children he had three, and he called them (the only evidence this of any other sort of faith in him) David, John, and Samuel. They were educated much more extensively and expensively than Simon had been, but none of them had the essence of their father, the will to success, in them. To be frank, they were wasters, and the money which Simon had accumulated by the sweat of his brow (and some uncharitably said at the price of his soul) was gradually dissipated. Simon had foreseen this in his latter years, and a part of his fortune had been invested in house property in which they had a life interest only. Time endorsed his action as wisdom, for the remainder of his money went in mean and sordid ways. John and David both drank heavily and, as is usually the case, in the end they were beaten by John Barley-

corn. They were both better dead. Their shares in their father's estate came to Samuel about the time that he took to himself a wife.

Samuel, it must be admitted in fairness, did not drink. He had no affirmative vices at all, but he was utterly ineffective. Had he been born in a working-class family he might have become an inferior clerk or a disastrous jobbing gardener; and have been quite happy. As it was, he was simply nothing. He spent futile laborious days confusing the gardener at Jessamine Lodge, the house where he lived in Hampstead in the early years of his married life.

If circumstances had permitted, Samuel Ward would have potted on contentedly in that sphere of life to which he had been called—a pleasant sphere on the whole to one of Samuel's placidity—but circumstances did not so permit. Two law suits, and a fraudulent solicitor were among the factors which disturbed the even running of his life, but in spite of them, through years of decreasing income, he potted steadily.

Houses unlet, heavy bills for repairs, certain by-laws which affect drains and a landlord's responsibilities therein, increased the rate of the income's diminution to such an extent that it was necessary to move to humbler quarters, and Jessamine Lodge was left behind. It was Mrs. Ward who insisted on the step at last. It was a terrible blow to her husband; there was no garden large enough to potter in and no gardener to bully feebly. Two years after he left Jessamine Lodge he gave up an unequal struggle and died very quietly one night, unobtrusively, as he had lived. His daughter Veronica was fourteen at the time. After his death the family moved to the country.

It was a quaint end for the fortune which Simon the Aggressive had built up. Within three generations

it had ceased to function excepting that it still provided some sort of an income for Mrs. Ward, and allowed her to talk financially. A faded photograph and a rapidly diminishing income were all that were left of the force which Simon had gathered together. One hopes he had his reward in the gathering; certain it is that in such minds as his the means and the end are often confused. The money he had, by fair means or foul, abstracted from other people had nearly all gone back, and the family he had made to emerge from the mass of people was steadily fading to the old indistinction.

Left alone, Mrs. Ward had faced the situation, and adjusted herself to it, with quiet courage. Her daughter received an education designed for a girl who had her living to obtain, for so attenuated had become the income which the residue of Simon's wealth still provided that the precaution was necessary. She had brought up Veronica very carefully, and was never tired of emphasizing her belief—her philosophy of life—that "ladies" were quite different from the rest of their sex. She was obsessed with the importance of money, which she exaggerated as most people do who have lost it. There was a vein of unfeminine cynicism in her—a subtle form of cowardice as is most cynicism—which jaundiced her outlook in life. In spite of the futility and misery which a similar course had brought to her, she was determined that Veronica should marry "money" if it were in her power to bring it about, and for years she endeavored to impress her desires on her daughter. Poverty, comparative poverty, anything short of comparative wealth was the worst of crimes in a husband. Lack of wealth invariably meant misery. Veronica was a "lady"—that is, a person who existed on a plane remote from bank clerks, civil servants, and the type of young man gen-

erally to be found in regrettable numbers everywhere.

When Veronica was nineteen a series of terrible accidents befell the sad remnant of Simon's fortune. Certain leasehold property "fell in" and consequent repairs ate up all Mrs. Ward's ready money and a considerable amount beside. A mortgagee chose this embarrassing time to foreclose, and certain property which had been expensively converted into flats and which was almost the only part of the estate which paid decently followed the leasehold property. There was more trouble about drains. To crown all, the estate agent tactlessly appropriated certain monies and decamped, leaving several bills very urgently due which poor Mrs. Ward understood had been duly paid by him. She died of heart failure half an hour after the news came about the estate agent, who was a man on whom she had relied absolutely.

Veronica was left as far as she knew without a relation in the world, and when she was able to see her mother's solicitor she discovered that the estate was in a very bad way indeed.

"I doubt," said the solemn little lawyer, "I very much doubt, Miss Veronica, if there will be much left at all. A few hundreds possibly. It is a most distressing business. Really, it has been . . . eh . . . a hand-to-mouth business for some time."

The solicitor was right. When all was cleared up, and the lawyers and bills paid, remained for Veronica only four hundred and sixty-one pounds, odd shillings and pence.

She had reserved sufficient of the furniture to furnish a little flat which she had found in St. Margaret's, and with the furniture, the money, and the education her mother's foresight had provided her with, she quietly faced the world demanding from it . . . Life. An opti-

mistic demand, but behind it was Youth and the new sense of freedom.

For some days she had answered advertisements from the long lists in the *Telegraph* and *Chronicle*, with varying results. To her delight a reply came from one which had greatly appealed to her, and she was asked to call at a certain hour to see a certain editor.

She discovered him to be quite a young man, and talked frankly to him of her difficulties and inexperience.

She found him a delightful young man, who offered her a trial. The result was that five years later she was that same young man's right hand. She knew his wife and loved his baby (he really *was* a charming young man), and Veronica knew that what success she had met with was, to a great extent, due to the good fortune which enabled her to concoct a letter sufficiently attractive to that young man to persuade him to give her the first interview.

She had grown very fond of her little flat, and increasing prosperity did not sever her from it. She had quite a big circle of friends in the locality, for she was one of those extremely fortunate girls who can keep as good friends the men who have made love to them in vain. And quite a lot of men had made love, in vain, to Veronica.

The first time Maurice Kennedy entered the flat was a dull Sunday afternoon a few months after that evening in Richmond Park, when he had asked Veronica to marry him. He walked from Richmond along the river, and, arrived at Hammerton's Ferry, he made up his mind to call. He crossed Marble Hill and made his way to Veronica's flat. She answered his knock herself.

"Hullo!" she said. "What do you want?"

"Well . . ." he commenced, and hesitated. He recovered and proceeded, "I thought you might care to come into Richmond for a cup of tea."

"On such a day?" she asked. "You didn't, Maurice! What do you want? Speak up now, like a man!"

"I really wanted a chat. In a wild moment I wondered if you would ask me into your flat and give me a cup of tea. I would even make the tea for you. . . ."

"You are a droll child," she said. "If I let you come in for an hour, you will promise not to annoy me?"

"Promise!" he said.

"Then come in!" She stood aside for him to enter.

"Put your things here," she said, indicating a minute stand in the passage, "and then come in."

He followed her into the little sitting room.

"What a jolly little place, Veronica," he said, looking around.

"Isn't it!" she said, delighted at his appreciation.

It was a very small room, but she had managed to get a piano into it, two very comfortable Morris chairs, and three small book-cases, without it appearing crowded.

Her pictures were in narrow gilt frames and were mainly colored prints from "Jugend" and the English "Color."

"Would you like tea now?" she asked.

"As you will. . . ."

"I'm going to have a cup anyway," she said, with that affected bluntness which suited her admirably.

"Come and see my kitchen."

It was the tiniest little kitchen imaginable, with a diminutive gas-stove. He watched her deftly produce the tea, and carried the tray into the sitting room for her, where she arranged a tiny table in front of the fire.

Followed the most delightful tea Maurice Kennedy had ever had.

She talked of books and the delights of being on one's own, and afterwards for awhile they sat in the firelight.

"I'm glad you came in, Maurice," she said. "As a matter of fact I'm very glad. I expected a girl to come down from town—a girl in the office—but evidently the weather has put her off. I should have been lonely if you had not come."

"Then I have not lived in vain," he said, with a disarming smile.

"Touché," she laughed. "Come on, we've got to clear away. Will you dry?"

"Rather!" he said enthusiastically.

Followed domesticity in the kitchen with great opportunities of laughter which left both of them a little exhilarated.

"Look here, Veronica," he said, "I know my hour is up, but come up to town with me. We can get grub somewhere. It might be quite amusing."

"Right-o!" she said, and a little later they set out.

They parted at her door some hours later, and for a moment she held his hand in hers.

"You're rather a dear, Maurice!" she said.

Which words delighted him absurdly, since she quite obviously meant them.

But afterwards, walking homeward alone, he wondered if she were not rather *too* good a companion.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

KENNEDY thought matters out very carefully in the months which followed that evening in the Park, and decided that for the time being there was nothing to be done. He and Veronica understood each other better, and although he did not again press her to marry him, they were on quite affectionate terms with each other.

He moved to Richmond a few weeks later, to rooms in Mount Ararat Road. Mrs. Hollyer wept when he gave her notice.

"What must be must be, as poor 'Ollyer used to say," she said amid her snuffling noises. "I shall miss yer, Mr. Kendy and I wishes yer well." She wiped her eyes and nose, which had also been affected by her sorrow, and "sposed" she had better bring his tea up. She was resigned. "'Ollyer's" Oriental philosophy had its virtues evidently.

The new landlady was a Norwegian lady with a thin un-English mouth. The rooms overlooked a big garden, and the Norwegian lady with her lack of what is called insular reticence (though goodness knows Mrs. Hollyer was not reticent, and she was almost indecently English) made him thoroughly at home at once.

After tea on the first day, it was a new experience for him to stroll down the hill into the town, knowing that he might quite easily meet Veronica there. She did not come, however, and he went to town to see Bate-man, whom he had not seen for some time.

Fanny was alone and, as always, was glad to see him.

"Where's Max?" he asked.

"Some conference or other," she said. "He'll be in any minute."

"And so you've gone to Richmond?" she asked later.

"Yes . . . it's much nicer. Clapham gets stuffier and stuffier."

She laughed. "That wasn't the main cause of your moving," she said, but at that moment Miss Pensimmon was announced. She sat by Fanny's side on the black chesterfield, and a little later Max himself came in.

Followed the normal evening of that quaint little home, and Kennedy accompanied Miss Pensimmon homewards when at last they left. She had moved to a flat near Westbourne Grove and hither they decided to walk, as although there was a touch of frost the evening was perfect. At her door she paused.

"Won't you come in awhile?" she asked. "I never go to bed before midnight."

He hesitated, obviously hesitated, and she divined the cause of his hesitation.

"As you will," she said shortly. "Good-night!"

Her annoyance had the effect of making him feel almost a cad, although by every canon of Mansfield Road his hesitation was justified. She was an unprotected woman—he knew the phrase to be at absurd variance with the facts the moment it came into his head.

"Well, it isn't really late, is it?" he said, attempting to obscure the real reason of his hesitation. "I will, just for a short time if you're certain I'm not keeping you up."

"Come in, then," she said, and, turning, she unlocked her door. Her flat was on the first floor and was one of three into which an old house had been converted.

The sitting room into which she led him was comfortably furnished, a low settee in front of a gas fire, and a piano, constituting the chief furniture. Over the fireplace was a big, colored print of Mona Lisa; it was in front of Kennedy when he sat down. For awhile he looked at the picture, although, like most people, he knew it as well as if the face were that of an acquaintance.

"I don't like that face," he said, "as a picture it's wonderful, but there's something in it which seems to me to be unspeakably cynical. I think a cynical woman must either have been horribly disappointed or naturally bad."

"I think it a beautiful face," said Esther Pensimmon, as she offered him a cigarette.

"But you admit the cynicism in the mouth?" he asked.

"No . . . I think she's saying. 'Now, as one woman to another. . . .'" Esther Pensimmon laughed lightly. It wasn't often she refused an argument.

Miss Pensimmon's room was quite unlike Veronica's. It struck Kennedy that it was very much like a man's; there was nothing in it which was very feminine, not even Miss Pensimmon, he thought. She sat in a small arm-chair opposite to him.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "I've been writing a short story. . . ."

"Oh!" she said. He was not certain whether behind her glasses she was looking at him.

"I wondered if you could put me in the way of selling it? It's finished, as a matter of fact, and typed."

"You have it in your pocket?" she asked. "Most people who have written one short story have it in their pocket, I notice. Let me read it." She smiled as she was speaking, and, as he knew, when she smiled her face was quite altered; it became almost pretty.

Without further equivocation he took out an envelope and handed it to her.

"There's some Kipling on that shelf if you would care to read while I'm looking through this."

"Thanks."

For awhile they both read; from time to time he glanced up from his book to watch the effect of his own story on its first reader. Her face was impassive, irritatingly impassive.

"It's not at all bad," she said, when she had made an end of it. "There's plenty of action in it, as I should have imagined there would be."

"It isn't absolutely hopeless?"

"No. It's not at all bad, as I said. I should cut down the first two pages if it were mine. You might try any of the monthlies with it, with some chance of getting it accepted, although if I were you I should send it to Smithers."

"Smithers?"

"He's my agent. Mention my name if you care to."

"Thanks ever so much, Miss Pensimmon."

"What do you want to write for?" she asked suddenly. "You have your own profession, and you can take it from me that writing means an enormous amount of uphill work. But then I'm a woman and I think any work means that for a woman."

"More so than for a man?"

"Yes. Take medicine. Look at the way the women work here to grind their way through the exams. The men seem to put in most of their time in the rugged field, and to treat their work and exams almost as incidental."

"But aren't you rather giving away the whole Suffragette case?" he asked.

"No. What I say has nothing to do with the Suffragette case."

fragettes or the Feminists. Have another cigarette. Don't mind my not smoking, but I've had my daily four."

In the light of the match as he lit the cigarette his face had an odd gravity, for he was still thinking over what she had said.

"You know," he said, "I shall never be able to write properly because I know so little about women."

"But one can become quite a successful writer without that knowledge," she said, with a smile. "Look at . . ." she mentioned several names. "Few men writers seem to know much about women. Meredith is an exception, but then he stands quite alone. I don't know why it is, because we are much simpler than men."

Followed more talk of a similar kind.

Kennedy was quite interested and obtained Esther Pensimmon's viewpoint on several questions. But always behind the interest was the idea that here was some one for whom he was sorry. For one thing she was so utterly unlike Veronica. She was not affirmatively a woman at all; and she affected the emotional side of his nature no more than if she had been a man. She appealed to his intelligence, not to his emotion, and the appeal she made was much less than that of several men he knew. He felt that Veronica would much rather a man thought her beautiful than clever, and he imagined that most women would agree with her. Intelligence didn't seem to matter in a woman if she were pretty, and yet if one took away Esther Pensimmon's intelligence there was nothing left. A phrase of Bate-man's came into his mind, "The greatest and most criminal waste in the world is that of women's intelligence."

Thus he pondered as his hostess talked.

It was nearly midnight when he rose to go.

In his opinion the one fact which evolved with clear-

ness from his talk with Esther Pensimmon was her sexlessness, as far as he was concerned she had no sex, she was not a woman; she was as much an intelligence as Bateman. The main thing about her was brain, and in Veronica—despite her cleverness—the brain was subsidiary. It was the woman in Veronica, not the intelligence, which appealed to him.

So he thought as the District train slipped through the darkness towards Richmond. But his thoughts were astray, for he had only the vaguest knowledge of either of the women of whom he thought.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SOME days after he had been in Esther Pensimmon's flat Maurice Kennedy called on Mr. Smithers. The great man had given him an appointment more to oblige Miss Pensimmon than for any hope of resultant business. He was a fat man who perspired all the time Kennedy was with him, and he continually wiped a spacious face with an enormous handkerchief.

"Quite so, quite so, Mr. Kennedy," he said, when the literary aspirant had confessed to the short story. "You've written occasionally for the political weeklies, you say? Fiction is a totally different market, of course." The obvious reply flashed into Kennedy's mind, but he did not utter it. An aspirant does not joke with *the* agent.

"Of course, I promise nothing until I have read the story, but Miss Pensimmon spoke highly of it," the great man continued. "If I think we can usefully work together"—an interruption of wiping—"I will send you the usual agreement to sign." The handkerchief was put away and the interview ended. Outside, even in Fleet Street, Kennedy breathed more freely, although the precious typed sheets neatly bound together with a wire paper fastener were in the possession of Mr. Smithers, and had ceased to be so fascinatingly personal.

For over a week he had not seen Veronica, and that evening he waited in Richmond about the time she usually passed through the town. She did not come. He waited until considerably past her usual time and then

sought his rooms up the hill. The exhilaration which had come to him as a result of Mr. Smithers' easy optimism passed away, but his drooping spirits were revived by the excellent meal which Madame had prepared for him. When all has been said, the fact remains that a good meal very greatly lightens disappointment, even when one is in love; it is a little sad, that fact.

Afterwards he determined to write to Veronica.

He lit a pipe and set out bravely.

"DEAR VERONICA," (he wrote),

"I'm horribly disappointed at not seeing you for so long. . . ."

He stuck at this point, and after a few minutes' thought he tore up the effort and started again.

"DEAR VERONICA,

"I rather wanted to see you in the town this evening, but you came not. I have taken my short story to an agent of whom I heard, and I hope that he will dispose of it for me."

Here again he stuck, and as he thought he remembered Veronica's dislike of young men whose conversation was simply about their own wonderful selves. The second effort was torn up.

The third letter achieved "Dear Veronica" only, and after a rather long interval of thought it went the way of its predecessors.

He was surprisingly placid, and he remained awhile looking into the fire. He was thinking of waiting in vain for Veronica that evening, and as he thought an idea for another short story came to him. It just bubbled up through his thoughts as such ideas will, and, on the spur of the moment, he turned to the writing pad,

where he had vainly attempted to concoct a letter to Veronica, and commenced to write. The idea was of the kind which almost writes itself and he made surprising progress. He wrote much more rapidly than he usually did, and with greater ease. For three hours he wrote, and at the end of that time he was the author of another short story. It was little more than a sketch—fifteen hundred words in length—but he read the pages through with that absolute satisfaction which is one of the joys of the literary beginner. Afterwards he was filled with a desire that some one else should read the story, and in the excitement, or rather in the exhilaration of the moment, he set out for Miss Pensimmon's flat. Instinctively, he knew he was assured of a welcome there; and there was no doubt in his mind as to the value of Esther Pensimmon's opinion.

Once during the tedious journey it struck him that the errand he was on was rather an impudent one. He had only met Esther Pensimmon half-a-dozen times and yet without hesitation he was calmly proposing to call at her flat, uninvited. But in the exhilaration which the reading of his work had brought to him he dismissed the doubt, or rather it quietly left him.

Esther Pensimmon opened the door herself and her surprise at seeing him was obvious.

"Come in," she said. "I hardly expected you again so soon."

The welcome was not quite so cordial as he had expected.

"I'm afraid I'm rather butting in, . . ." he commented. "It's unconscionably late. . . ."

"Not at all. Come on inside. I'm glad you've come. I was just beginning to feel lonely."

He followed her into the sitting room, and he noticed that in the shaded light she was very much prettier than

he remembered her before. Her hair was slightly untidy, and untidiness was far more becoming in her than her normal exactness. He sat on the chesterfield in front of the fire, and she took her usual seat in the little arm-chair.

"Well," she said, "and what did the great Smithers say?"

"He was very nice . . . thanks to you."

"Yes. He's done a lot of work for me," she said.

"He is considering the matter," Kennedy went on. "Whether he'll handle my work or not, I mean."

"He rather likes your story," Esther Pensimmon said. "I was on the 'phone to him this afternoon and he mentioned it."

"I'm most awfully obliged to you, Miss Pensimmon."

"Not at all," she said, with a touch of her coldness which almost startled him.

"Are you doing much along now?" he asked.

"Very little indeed. I'm one of the idle rich these last few weeks since my aunt died, and I've given up writing merely for money. I'm doing work still for the women's papers, but they don't pay me. The papers which matter rarely have any money."

"It must be fine writing simply what one wants to," he said, ignoring the last remark.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"What I really came in for," he said, "was to ask you to read another little thing of mine. I should be awfully obliged if you would. I know you are most frightfully busy. . . ." His words died away as he noticed a peculiar smile on her face.

"Of course I will, Mr. Kennedy," she said. "It's funny though, men never come to me unless they want something. I sometimes think it's generally true of all men and all women."

To this no reply was necessary or forthcoming, and he handed the story to her.

"I'm sorry it isn't typewritten," he apologized. "I only wrote it this evening."

"I can read your writing quite easily," she said. "This won't take long," she went on. "But if you want to read you'll find books and papers all over the place."

"Thanks."

And again followed the scene in which Kennedy held an open book in his hand the while he furtively watched the effect of his work on Esther Pensimmon, or at least as much of the effect as her well-schooled face permitted him to see.

As she read he pondered over the lack of all expression of emotion in his hostess, and attributed it to the very superficial cause that she was almost incapable of emotion; that that which was not expressed, was not. Here Kennedy was very wrong indeed, for Esther Pensimmon belonged to that class of women which modern conditions and ancient prejudices have conspired to produce, the class in which emotion is suppressed, in which *fear* of emotion is almost the dominating trait. It is a great and an increasing class; one sees them everywhere, sharp-featured, intelligent, usually independent, quietly dressed, often more interesting than women whose lives are more normal; they go about their work—their careers and professions—with a careful clarity in detail and a peculiar, cold efficiency which makes them more valuable in certain walks of life than men. They save money and are often comparatively well off; they holiday in Switzerland and such places—usually two together—and look out on the world with pathetically intelligent eyes. In age they vary from thirty to forty-five. They realize the ideal of the male Feminists; they are independent, unshackled, free as any man save only

for bonds which no law or suffrage can modify. And, to the superficial observer, they are triumphantly independent of emotion, of love, of the great unsettling forces in nature; so much so that one is apt to forget that they are women, to regard them as interesting, intelligent companions, as one regards some men. And yet they *are* women; and no matter how the fact is disguised, no matter with how complete a mask they may regard the world, no matter how sedulously they may pursue their appointed calling, they are women, and when the last thing has been said and the last vote snatched, the central, the dominating thing in a woman's life is this fact that she is a woman.

Esther Pensimmon had stifled emotion, crushed the most valuable part of herself, and this not from choice, but because no man had seen fit to appeal to the latent emotion in her, or no man in whom was the power to appeal effectively. She had been successful by orthodox standards. She had made a name in journalism, and had furthered the causes to which she was devoted. Her life had been a useful one, in a sense a full one, and yet Maurice Kennedy, watching her reading his story, wondered at her lack of emotion, and, with that facile superiority which men under thirty so easily adopt toward women, assumed that she lacked a capacity for it. If there is one thing in life which saddens its serious student more than the waste of women's intelligence—the electricity of unharnessed human tides—it is the cold brutal wastage of women's emotion.

Esther Pensimmon turned over the last page of the story she was reading and Kennedy waited anxiously for her verdict. His speculations about her and "Women" generally ceased as she looked up.

"Not bad," she said. "Quite amusing, and it should sell. It's worthless though," she added.

"Worthless?" he asked, and his disappointment was obvious.

"Yes. I've written equally worthless stuff myself," she said, "but I shall not again. In the past I've had to write to live, and that means I've had to supply the stuff which is in demand. You have your Civil Service job, and no such excuse. If you value my advice, I would urge you to do moderately serious work. There's no excuse for your writing a single consciously-bad line. There's enough poor devils in London already who have to."

"But I rather like writing flippantly," he said, a little disconsolately.

"Then do it," she agreed. "If you really enjoy writing, as you say, flippantly, it will be as good as you can do. Don't write unless you want to. That's the great secret. I always hated writing, positively hated it. I never did it unless I simply had to and now I am writing only for the papers which I believe are doing, or may do, good."

"The women's papers?"

She nodded and handed the story back to him. "Send it to Smithers," she said.

For awhile they talked and she made him coffee. He admired her efficient method, and the coffee was good. Perhaps emboldened by the coffee he plunged.

"Why are you a Feminist?" he asked. "You don't hate men; you don't hate me, for example, or Bateman."

She smiled.

"No. I like both of you. Indeed, I like most of the few men I have known at all intimately."

"Then why are you . . .?" he hesitated for the word and she supplied it.

"Bitter?" she said, and he nodded.

"You had better put it down to the natural cussed-

ness of an old maid," she said, with a smile, a smile which rather surprised him, for there was something in it which reminded him irresistibly of his mother.

"That's rot!" he said. "Apart from the one question you're almost the most reasonable person I know."

She smiled again.

"The world is rather a terrible place for some women," she said slowly and he noticed that she was looking down into the fire. "I am a Feminist because I believe that if women had a greater say in world governance, the world would be an infinitely better place. I don't mean only voting; to a great extent that doesn't matter, but the point of view of the woman must be emphasized in society and in human relations."

"I'm awfully sorry," Kennedy said, "but I have great difficulty in following you. You use generalities such a lot. 'Emphasizing a point of view,' really conveys very little to my mind. What really do you want altering?"

"Well . . . it's a delicate subject to speak about, but I know you are used to frankness at the Batemans. Take the question of children. To most women, to nine out of ten of them, it is the most important question in life, far more so than that of a husband, for example. I think most men would be surprised if they knew how many women, in their hearts, regarded their husbands as a means to a very much greater end. A woman's lord and master flatters himself that he has been married for himself alone."

"Well, granted all that you say, and I don't, I don't see yet what you are driving at. Even if women deceive men—that is what your statements amount to—I still can't see why that makes you a Feminist. I can much more easily imagine it making me a Homoist."

"A Homoist?" She did not for a moment grasp the

meaning of the word, which she repeated, but when she did so she smiled.

"You quaint child!" she said.

"I still cannot see your grievance as a sex, I mean. You appear to be attacking marriage as an institution. I don't mind a bit. It's a human institution and as such has been, and continually will be, modified. But, broadly speaking, I think it will not be fundamentally modified, for usually a thing or an institution which has survived through the ages is fairly vital."

"Marriage is all very well as far as it goes," Esther Pensimmon said. "But what of the thousands of women like me, many of whom have never had an opportunity of marriage? I have had two such offers, but neither were from men whom, at the time, I would marry. And because I'm not married I'm quietly placed on one side by Society as a person of no consequence, a kind of withered branch."

"You're in exactly the same position as a bachelor."

"Not quite . . . he usually can marry if he wants to and . . . there are other differences. Besides men and women are different fundamentally in their relationship to each other."

"It certainly seems unjust . . . " Kennedy admitted.

"It is unjust. Why should numbers of women be condemned to barrenness because no man has married them, or why even should a woman be forced to marry? Many women who desire children do not desire the ordinary married life, particularly modern enlightened women."

"It does seem unjust," Kennedy repeated. The intensity of feeling in Esther Pensimmon's words embarrassed him, for all that he was accustomed to hearing such questions discussed at Bateman's. There was a wistful, personal touch about the words which lent a

strange poignancy to them. He had a feeling that Esther Pensimmon had removed a mask, had for a few moments bared her soul to him. He wondered why she had chosen him as a confidant as he watched her gazing down into the fire. He thought of the pretty, vapid, childless married women he had known, women whose beauty or prettiness was their only appeal to a man, women lacking the intelligence or the poignancy which he had discovered that night in Esther Pensimmon, but yet women who had achieved happiness as far as such women are capable of happiness. And, inevitably, he thought of Veronica Ward. She was utterly unlike the woman who gazed silently into the fire a few yards from him, prettier, more affirmatively, if less subtly, a woman, possessing an attraction for Kennedy many times greater than did the other. In that attraction was no pity: *nothing incompatible with equality*. Kennedy knew that between him and Veronica existed that equality for which Esther Pensimmon had been striving all her life, striving and asserting and yet wholly failing to achieve.

Suddenly Esther looked up and laughed. Kennedy saw her face assume its normal placidity as if with a jerk.

"You'll think I'm a bore, Mr. Kennedy," she said. "Riding my hobby-horse and inflicting these little lectures on you. It is foolish of me; I know quite well it is one of the reasons why I'm so unpopular with men."

"Not at all. I have been quite interested. It's a peculiar point of view I had not appreciated before. And really I do see that there is much in what you say."

"You *are* a quaint child!" she said again. "That I think is one of the compensations of such women as me.

We see more clearly than others the childishness, the dependence of men." For all her disarming smile he imagined seriousness in her words.

A little later he rose to go and she stood in the tiny hall with him.

"I wonder if you are such a child," she said, as she helped him into his coat.

"The mere doubt is a compliment," he laughed.

"Not wholly. Come and see me again whenever you want to, whenever you have a story on which you want my opinion."

"Thanks very much," he said. "Good-night!"

But for some time after he had left her, even after the sound of his steps had died away, she remained standing there, and then, very quietly, she shut the door.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DULY the story went to the great Smithers, and Kennedy waited anxiously for news of it. It was nearly a fortnight since he had seen Veronica and he had made up his mind to call at her home when her letter came. She asked him to meet her that evening in Richmond at 6.30, and at the hour she had appointed Kennedy was there. He walked through the town to the District Station without meeting her, and discovered that her train was in, had been in to time. She obviously had not been in it, for it was impossible for him to have missed her in the town.

He waited.

Another train came in without her, and he became anxious.

Another train, and another. Three-quarters of an hour late; he decided that something had happened and disconsolately went home. He knew of old that there would be a letter in the morning explaining why she had been unable to keep the appointment which she herself had made.

Madame commented on his dejected appearance without response from Kennedy, and after his meal he went to town. He hesitated awhile between the Batemans and a Music Hall, and in the end he went to the latter. The programme was half over, but Robey had not yet appeared when Kennedy arrived. The comedian always lightened Kennedy's outlook during a fit of the blues, and he left the Music Hall feeling much more exhilarated than when he entered it. He called at the

Batemans only to find the house in darkness and thence made his way to Waterloo in time for the twelve ten. As he came out of the underground unto the main station he suddenly saw Veronica. She was saying goodbye to the man with whom he had seen her several times on the river, the tall solemn man to whom she referred as Squidge. She was wearing some sort of an evening cloak and her hair was uncovered. By the time he reached the platform she had entered the train and he walked along looking for her. She was in a carriage with another lady.

"Hallo!" she said. "Fancy meeting you!"

He sat opposite to her.

"I was awfully sorry about this evening, Maurice," she said softly, when the train had started and it was possible to speak without being overheard.

He shrugged his shoulders. It was impossible to discuss the matter in front of the strange lady, who appeared to take a very deep interest in her fellow travellers. It is remarkable how many lonely ladies one meets in life who are deeply interested in their fellow travellers.

For awhile they sat in silence. Two girls got in at Clapham Junction and giggled as far as Putney. The lonely lady transferred her absorbed attention to the new-comers and the three of them alighted at Putney.

"Thank goodness!" said Veronica. "Sometimes I hate people."

Maurice Kennedy, having nothing to say, maintained his half-sullen silence.

"I *am* sorry over to-night," Veronica repeated.

"So am I," he said. "If you make an appointment, I think you might keep it, Veronica."

"You never call me Veronica excepting you are in a temper with me."

"Well, I'm not exactly pleased with you."

"I *did* mean to keep the appointment."

"Naturally, I suppose you did. The fact remains though that you didn't."

"If only you were on the 'phone," she said, and her manner suggested that at least part of the blame was his.

"You knew that I was not when you made the appointment. Why didn't you keep it?"

"I know it *sounds* horrid . . ." she began and let her words trickle out in her old maddening manner.

"It *looks* still horrider," he said grimly.

"I want you to be reasonable, Maurice . . ." she commenced, and again her words petered out.

"Oh, my God!" he said, in despair. "Reasonable!"

"And please don't swear!" she seized on the slightest possibility of protest.

"Look here, Veronica," he said firmly. "It's no use coming it to-night. I'm *not* to blame in any degree at all. You made an appointment with me . . . you suggested the time and place. You did not keep it. I meet you at Waterloo saying good-by to another man, and the upshot of it all is that you put on a very dignified air and say '*Please* don't swear!'"

"It *does* sound beastly, doesn't it?" She looked at him and smiled cheerfully. It was the blindest and most disarming smile in the world, and under its effect he had to make an enormous effort to maintain his sense of injury.

"That's all very well," he said.

"It was only Squidge," she said.

"That's the point. It *was* only Squidge. It should have been me . . . I, I mean."

She laughed. "'Me' sounds better really," she said.

"I'm waiting for you to tell me why you saw fit to make a fool out of me to-night."

"Maurice . . . I didn't!"

"You knew that I should hang about in Richmond for you."

"I've waited for you before now!"

"I've never broken an appointment with you since I've known you."

"Well, I've said I'm sorry," she insisted, as if that really should end the affair.

"Surely you've some explanation?"

"What is the good of explaining, Maurice. You saw that it was Squidge. I told you he was going away, and he rang me up and asked me to have dinner with him and go to a theater. I had my new frock and the two facts in conjunction were too strong for me. Besides, Squidge is an older pal than you are, and I felt that, when I told you, you would be sufficiently generous to understand. I practically had to see him. He would have been frightfully cut-up if I hadn't. You must see what an awkward situation I was in. I'm very fond of him and I couldn't get to you to put the appointment off. And I wanted to wear my frock. It is nice, Maurice, isn't it?" She stood up and opened the cloak she was wearing. Underneath she had on a black evening frock, which was as she had said, "nice." The beautiful whiteness of her neck gleamed at him.

Kennedy grunted.

"Thank you," she said, apparently reading into the grunt some sort of approval for the frock. "I'm so glad you like it. I'm afraid you are not fond of me, a bit."

"You're incorrigible, Veronica," he said. "Really, you've got the coolest nerve I've ever seen in a girl."

You quietly put off one man for another and then exhibit for the discarded one's approval the dress in which you have dined with the other man. You've no sense of . . . fitness."

"I thought it was going to be worse than 'fitness'!" she said.

"Smargret's!"

The porter's clarion call interrupted their conversation, and as they turned out of the station she slipped her arm in his.

"If it had been any one else than Squidge I could understand your being annoyed. You old silly, Squidge is married!"

"What?"

"Yes, he is. He's been married six years. He doesn't get on with his wife. So much so indeed that she's not going with him to Africa. We've known each other over five years now."

"He's one of the 'If only we had met before' brigade then?" said Kennedy bitterly.

She took her hand away from his arm.

"Aren't you being very horrid?" she asked, with a touch of sharpness.

"Not particularly. Do you mean to say that he hasn't told you how sorry he was that he hadn't met you before he was married?"

"What if he has?"

"Nothing. Only it shows he belongs to the brigade who go about sighing to every person they meet of the opposite sex who attract them, 'Ah, if only we had met before!' I've heard Bateman say that London is full of people who pretend that their marriages are failures, and gain a certain romantic attraction by so doing. It makes people, girls particularly, sorry for them. And

it panders to the conceit of the girl and she says to herself, 'What a difference it would have made in this man's life if only we had met!' And then she breaks off an appointment with a man who hasn't made a mess of his life by marrying the wrong woman, and who wouldn't give his wife away if he had, and meets 'poor' Jim or 'poor' Mac or 'poor' somebody else and listens to him sighing for what might have been. The ordinary unhappy married man is a colossal humbug. He usually has a wife in the background who has given him the best years of her life, and of whom he has got a little tired. If he hasn't he pretends he has, and trots around with the rest of his melancholy brigade sighing to every romantic female he meets, 'Ah, if only we had met before!'

"Go on!" she said, at the end of it. "Keep going on. I like it. Bateman surely didn't tell you all that precious nonsense?"

"I know Bateman agrees with what I said. I'm quite certain that he wouldn't let another woman know that he was tired of Fanny, or had made a mistake in marrying her, even if he had."

"You're sure he wouldn't?" she asked.

"Quite!" he repeated.

"Well, that settles it, doesn't it?" she asked innocently.

"There are times, Veronica," he said, "when it would give me very great satisfaction to take you by your pretty shoulders and shake you until your teeth rattled."

"My shoulders are pretty, aren't they?" she asked. "And you couldn't make my teeth rattle even if you tried. Whatever you say, Squidge never wants to ill-treat me."

"Oh, damn Squidge!"

"I won't!" she said imperturbably. "He's too old a pal. And I'm sorry enough for him already, in spite of your lecture."

They turned into Veronica's road.

At the door they paused and for a moment neither spoke.

"I'm sorry, Maurice," she said, with an intonation which conveyed to him that she had gone as far as she meant to in her regret.

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you!" he said.

"I suppose so!" she said.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"I don't know. I'd rather not make a definite appointment after to-night. We're bound to meet sometimes in the town. Usually I walk from Richmond, as you know."

"But I love you . . ." he insisted.

"So I gathered, you old silly!"

"That's something, anyway!" he said grimly.

"Well, good-by," she said, and held out her hand.

As he turned away he heard her voice.

"Maurice!" she said. He turned sharply. "You were right," she went on. "I did deserve shaking." She was gone before he could reply.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WITHIN two years of writing his first short story Maurice Kennedy ceased to be a Civil Servant. He found that his work met with ready acceptance at the hands of the different editors, and that he could make far more money by working three hours a day as a manufacturer of fiction than eight as a Civil Servant.

The final step was taken strongly against the advice of his father, who foresaw red ruin and the end of all things. Mrs. Kennedy was anxious, but, despite all her husband could say, would not actively oppose her son's desire. Bateman was enthusiastically for the change. . . . "You'll do better work, Kennedy, you may even do *good* work," he said. Veronica believed that he had his own life to lead, but he should be careful in taking irrevocable steps. "Was it irrevocable?" she asked. "It was." Finally she assumed a position not unlike that of his mother, and was tolerant without being at all positive. Strangely, Reggy agreed with Bateman but from very different motives. "There is nothing *in* it, Maurice," he said. "You work and work and after giving your whole blinking life to an office you get a few hundreds a year. There's nothing *in* it. You can't starve outside, and there's chances. If the worst comes to the worst I'll give you a job."

Maurice weighed his friends' advice, but in the end decided in accordance with his own wishes. He rather liked the work at the office . . . it made no great strain on him mentally, and there was something soothing in

its routine. To be tied from nine to four or five, after all, was not such a hardship . . . it had become a habit. And there were long quiet evenings in which one could write. The writing was quite different from the work in the office . . . it nullified the soothing effect of the work there, it gave one a sense of exhilaration. He was doubtful if he could write in the mornings.

And above all there was the *security* of the office. One sacrificed a great deal . . . one had not the financial possibilities of a Reggy or the mental ones of a Bateman, but one could not die in the gutter, and to die in a gutter had been the boggy of bogies in Mr. Kennedy's reminiscent philosophy as far back as his son could remember.

For some months Maurice hesitated at the partings of the ways. To leave the office was a wrench . . . he liked the men there very much indeed, he discovered, when it came to leaving them.

But on the other hand was freedom. He would be able to wander round the country staying here . . . staying there. Going on when he willed. It would be a new life, new ideas would come surging into his mind with his widening experience.

He saw his chief, a white-haired man who had spent his life in the office in which little world he had achieved some sort of distinction. The chief listened gravely. He liked Kennedy.

"It's a most serious step," he said at the end. "It's practically irrevocable. Besides, in your case, I'm certain you wouldn't admit failure by attempting to come back. Of course, you know as well as I do what prospects you have here. The scope is limited, but you will find that with the years the security—the absence of the cruder worries from one's life—are almost compensating advantages. In the business world I sometimes think I

should have done very much better than I have done here."

Kennedy thought so as well, but maintained his silence.

"It's one of those things, Kennedy," the chief went on, "in which it is impossible for me to advise you. You're master of your work here . . . your knowledge will be thrown away. Your salary is getting to a reasonable figure. The position is that you've given the best years of your life to the Service for a low salary, and now that your emoluments are reaching a figure more or less commensurate with your work you turn the job in, as the people say. You must think it over very carefully. Literature is, after all, extremely precarious. Really good men have failed in it, become embittered, disillusioned. Years ago I faced the position which confronts you to-day. I decided to stay on, and for the life of me I don't know whether I was wise. As I said, you've got to think things out for yourself. Take a few days' leave, my boy, and go right away alone . . . and let me know when you come back what you have decided."

"Thank you, sir," said Kennedy at the conclusion of the interview. Long afterwards he looked back to that talk with his chief, whom he regarded as a very fine type of Civil Servant.

He acted on the advice he had received and went away. He stayed at a little hotel in Lyme Regis and spent hours wandering in the Devon lanes around. In the end he went back to his office and sent in his resignation. He was calmer once the step had been taken.

The day came when he left his office for the last time. The chief's rather formal manner had thawed when he said good-by to Kennedy. "I hope you're doing the right thing . . . in any case, God bless you!" Ken-

nedy was touched. He had never suspected the chief of deep feeling, yet he knew that behind his words was much that was unspoken. But the widening possibilities of life ahead obscured his regrets almost at once. He had saved most of the money which his short stories had produced, and always behind him was the pound a week which his second cousin had left to him.

The step was taken, and he faced the world that June morning an author, no longer an amateur, no longer a dabbler in letters, but a serious, professional writer. It was a glorious morning; no clouds were in the sky or in his heart. He meant to go to Cornwall to work for awhile. He was glad the day was fine. It was an omen.

He walked along the Strand and noticed the out-of-work actors hanging about Bedford Street, and so into Fleet Street, where he entered Veronica's office. He knew her little room and she looked up in surprise as he entered.

"Hallo!" she said.

"I thought I'd look you up," he said casually.

"Why?"

"Why shouldn't I? I'm a Free-lance, Veronica. I'm no longer a Civil Servant. No longer am I a slave doomed to grind from dawn to dusk. . . ."

"Don't be ridiculous, and sit down. You've really left!"

"Really . . . I feel lighter already. I'm going down to Fowey to-morrow, to the Ship Hotel. I shall stay there three months, I think."

"All right, but don't swank. Seriously, Maurice, I do hope what you have done turns out all right. All the luck in the world, old boy." She held out her hand to him and with an odd reluctance he took it.

"What I really want is to persuade you to have dinner with me to-night . . . my last night."

"Aren't you going to your people at Shere?"

"No. I was there yesterday. Will you?"

"I shall be delighted. . . . I shall hate losing you, though," she added thoughtfully.

"You won't lose me, Veronica. I suppose it hasn't struck you that I'm rather a difficult sort of man to lose?" His eyes were on hers as he asked the question.

"Yes . . . that has struck me," she admitted with a smile.

"Well, I won't keep you. I know how busy you office people are."

"Don't swank so horribly, Maurice," she laughed. "Your freedom is only about two hours old, you know. It's rather a delicate plant yet."

He went back to the flat he had taken some months before at Richmond, where he had a few arrangements to complete.

In the afternoon he bade farewell to Bateman, who was frankly delighted at the step he had taken. His friend was preparing a series of lectures which he was giving at different Socialist branches round London during the coming winter. Kennedy stayed with him until it was time to meet Veronica.

"There's always a bed here for you, Kennedy," Bateman said. "You need never worry about notifying us. Whenever you're in town——"

Waiting for Veronica, Kennedy had time to ponder on the strange friendship which had come into existence between Bateman and himself. After five years he was still unable to understand it. He and his friend were at the sharpest variance on almost every question on which men may differ. Each was convinced that the other was wasting his life, and yet an affection, which apparently only increased with the years, held them together.

"Ah, there you are!" he said, as Veronica was suddenly at his side.

"Am I late?" The question was asked in a most disarming manner.

"You know perfectly well, dear, that you are; but come along."

She slipped her hand in his as they turned out of Shaftesbury Avenue into Soho and without discussing it they went to the little café where they had dined together so often, and where there was one of those astoundingly intelligent waiters who treated every one in a delightfully individual way.

Contrary to their usual custom, they talked very little during the meal. Both were thoughtful. With the coffee (which the waiter himself made at the table, with an air of doing the one thing which really pleased him) they became conscious of the lack of words between them, and Veronica commenced to talk.

"You'll like Fowey," she said. "I was there some years ago. It's as charming as 'Q' makes it in his books. Most 'literary' places aren't."

"It was his work which attracted me," Kennedy confessed. "A place which lets a man write 'The Roll-call of the Reef' must be worth while."

She sipped her coffee meditatively.

"I wish . . ." her words trickled out in the old curiosity-arousing way, and she continued sipping.

"Yes?" he urged, but, as of old, urged in vain.

"No matter," she said, and then added, "You are very lucky, you know," and smiled at him out of blue eyes.

"Up to a point," he conceded. "Thus far and no farther kind of business. You look positively ripping in this light, Veronica. It brings out unsuspected warm tints in your skin."

"You silly child!" she replied.

"What shall we do this evening?" he asked, a little later.

"I don't want to do anything. I've been 'doing' all day."

"But it's only nine o'clock. . . ."

"Would you mind . . . but there, I suppose now that you are distinguished you would object to anything so simple."

"As what?" he asked.

"As riding back to Richmond on the top of a motor bus . . . on the front seat. We could talk," she added.

"I should love to," he said. "I will waive my distinction," he added with a smile.

And so they found themselves in the front seat of a 33 bus, and talked of the myriad things which swim into one's ken during a motor bus ride on a summer evening in London. It was faintly dusk, and in the dying day London was a city of beautiful color. The bus took them through wildly different social strata . . . here were shops discreetly shuttered and main thoroughfares almost deserted; here crowds of people and huckstering shop-keepers shouting their wares. The people who joined them on the bus were a ceaseless wonder. They had celebrated their dinner with unwonted champagne, and saw people and things through a faint, rose haze. They were young and happy, as the young should be, as the young were surely meant to be, else why the world? They were so happy that they talked very little of themselves; even youth doesn't when it is happy.

Richmond came with uncanny quickness, and they walked along the Middlesex Bank to Marble Hill. The river was nearly deserted. The dusk was deepening almost perceptibly into a blue-gray night, and the air

was warm with the warmth of the June day which had glided past them. Over the Terrace hung one star vivid against a deep turquoise background, a tiny pivotal star, a beautiful serene, composed little star.

They passed through the iron gate just past the flats, and into the silence and the dimness of the trees beyond. The old river slipped by them darkly to the waiting sea, the old, old river of memories and dreams. The air was full of the bitter, pungent, refreshing smell of water-plants, the smell which so easily becomes part of the night and which is interwoven with the memories of those who live near the river.

For awhile they walked in silence, both sensitive to the quiet beauty around them, both acutely conscious of the other's presence. She slipped her arm into his again.

"I shall come back, Veronica," he said, with apparent irrelevance, and with a quality in his tone which was not lost on her.

"Of course," she said, almost sharply.

"And I shall ask you again what I have already asked you, dear," he went on.

She was silent.

"I shan't ask you now Veronica, because I know what you will say to me. But I love you."

"I almost believe you do to-night," she said quietly. "You are going away to work, Maurice, not to think of me. . . . I'm really not worth it. This isn't silly mock-modesty. Really, I believe, I know, that I'm not worth the love of a man like you. I'm too . . . too selfish. The world is full of better girls . . . braver girls."

She hesitated perceptibly before the word braver, and he seized on it.

"Braver?" he questioned.

"Yes . . . braver. At bottom I'm a coward. It explains nearly everything about me."

"You're not," he said, with quiet emphasis.

"*You're* a dear," she replied, "and I know you mean what you say. But you don't understand me. I am selfish and I am a coward, and I don't deserve half that life gives me."

"The great misunderstood?" he laughed. "Seriously, Veronica, we seem to give different meanings to the same word. To me you are the bravest girl in the world. You have faced life alone, and won through. . . ."

"Yes," she said. "I suppose I have what you call won through." There was a wistfulness in the words.

"Aren't you just a little moody, dear, to-night?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders for reply, and in truth the rose tints had left the night for her.

"Sometimes I wish you were just a tiny little bit more understanding, Maurice," she complained.

"I wish I understood *you* more," he replied.

"A girl isn't always the same. . . . Sometimes a girl who is set on a definite course can be very lonely, and want. . . . Oh, but I'm talking nonsense," she pulled herself up with a jerk.

"You're not, dear. Besides, I do understand, a little anyway."

"If only I were not such a coward," she said again.

"I wish I knew what was wrong, Veronica."

They stopped where the path turns away from the river just beyond Marble Hill and sat in the funny little seat there which is tilted backwards. Many stars had joined the serene little fellow which had hung in solitude over the Terrace, and before them the river went on, blue-gray, inscrutable.

"Sometimes the water makes me miserable," said Veronica.

"You *are* moody, dear. I shall begin to flatter myself that you are upset because I'm going away."

"Of course I am. Don't you know that?" She sat up and looked down at him. "I'm very fond of you, Maurice . . . you don't seem able to see that because I don't want to be married I can still be very fond of you. Besides you are rather a dear."

"Veronica, I believe you're trying to flirt with me!" he said.

"No. I'm not. I'm just quietly fond of you and I shall miss you a great deal, and naturally I'm not altogether as delighted at your going as you seem to expect me to be."

He slipped his arm round her waist and he felt her come a little nearer to him. For awhile they sat in silence. There was something infinitely comforting in that arm around her. . . .

A man came along the path towards them and she sat up sharply.

"We must be going," she said, and reluctantly he rose.

"After all, you'll be up in town fairly frequently," she said as they turned into the road leading to the flat.

At her door she paused and held out her hand.

"Good-by, Maurice," she said.

He retained her hand in his, the while his eyes were on hers.

"Good-by," he said, after a few seconds. "I love you. . . ."

He let her hand go and it fell limply to her side.

Suddenly, moved by some deep impulse, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. She had never

kissed him before. He was amazed, but before his scattered wits returned she was gone. He heard her door close very quietly and he turned away with wild thoughts of blue eyes which had looked at him through a mist.

The next day he went to Fowey and for five weeks he worked there under ideal conditions. And then one morning he saw in the *Chronicle* that the international situation was rather complicated. It would blow, over, of course; he went on with the story he was writing, an idyll of a Cornish fishing village in which the heroine insisted on becoming absurdly like Veronica.

There were further complications next morning. Talk of mobilization. It was absurd, of course. In the twentieth century even statesmen, even old men with power, could not possibly bungle things so horribly that war would break out; no matter how old they were they could not be such abysmal fools. He finished the story. It was a charming little thing, a certain seller, and it pleased him.

There was talk in the bar of the hotel that night among the Cornishmen, war talk. Vague talk of official letters delivered to reservists, and the like.

The next morning the paper spoke of War . . . it loomed up sinister and evil, athwart the world's horizon. It was too utterly abominable, the whole thing. . . . It was just newspaper talk. Surely to God, Civilization. . . . It was childish. He went on with his work and sailed with an ancient sailor in the afternoon who said horrid things about Germany and the Germans. How we would smash them, how we would march to Berlin, what he (the old fisherman) would like to do to different organs of the Kaiser.

It was nauseating to Kennedy. All round was peace, and clean sunlight, glorious day. And in the end of

the boat was that droning old imbecile wheezing out sulphur about what *we* were going to do to the Kaiser.

Next day the deluge!

England was at war with Germany.

It was incredible but there it was in cold print.

Kennedy took the paper out with him into a quiet lane and read it over again.

From the mass of irrelevant detail the figure of Sir Edward Grey stood out, altogether dignified, altogether calm, altogether firm. He had quietly stepped to the side of France.

Kennedy saw very clearly what it all meant to him. . . .

He returned to the hotel, packed up pathetic manuscripts, sent two completed ones to Smithers, and took the afternoon train back to London.

BOOK II

CHAPTER ONE

THE people who shared Kennedy's carriage on that very beautiful August day were in a state of dazed excitement, and most of them had purchased several papers. That was the predominant note in the train . . . papers. Kennedy had the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, and the *Chronicle*, and he read them all, and re-read them.

Towards midday the express was shunted into a siding and two troop trains went by to some vague, wonder-arousing destination. It was as if an eddy of the maelstrom had rippled up to them. All reserve—that traditional British reserve which is never quite so evident as in the travelling Briton—broke down, and strangers talked intimately, fearfully. It was symptomatic, that breaking down of British reserve in the carriage on that hot August afternoon. . . .

An elderly gentleman opposite reviled his race for not having listened to Lord Roberts. "I saw it coming," he kept on saying. "I saw it coming. Too many damned politicians. . . ." The poor old gentleman also said terrible things about a certain little Welsh lawyer, and surely Time—that gentle ironist—smiled.

A commercial traveller in the corner seat, anxious and explanatory, proved that it had been "bound" to come and that they (the enemy) had bitten off more than they could chew. He agreed with the elderly and redly-perspiring gentleman that the Navy was "all right" and thanked "Gawd" for it.

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A little later Kennedy went along to the luncheon car.

The meaning of the war came to him very forcibly as he sat waiting for his lunch. All these quiet comforts—his half-crown lunch with the country sliding by at fifty miles an hour—spoke of an amazingly delicate organization behind the common life of every day, an organization much greater, much more subtle and intricate than any which had existed in other ages and other wars. Could it stand the shock? The whole thing seemed to him to be very like the act of a vicious boy who thrusts a knitting needle into the mechanism of a beautifully adjusted watch . . . and then moves the needle about feelingly.

But the lunch came, brought to him by a waiter, a young man of twenty-five or so, a phlegmatic young man who apparently had heard nothing of War. It was an excellent lunch and afterwards he went back to the elderly gentleman and the others. The elderly gentleman was devouring sandwiches efficiently, and had produced a very bright silver flask from somewhere. He was not quite so red or so agitated.

At length came Paddington with the peculiar fusty and welcome smell of London. Kennedy expected some vague change. There was none.

An evening paper spoke of the recruiting scenes in London and the Provinces, and it came to him with sudden and illuminating clearness that he must join the Army. The clearness was cold, and he stood a little dazed, paper in hand, with his luggage round him.

"Cab, sir!" The porter recalled him to himself and presently he was on his way to Waterloo and Richmond. He had wired to his old landlady in Mount Ararat Road and she was able to put him up. Alone in his room he had time to think things over, and the more he

thought the more he saw that the whole affair was . . . words could not describe its degree of awkwardness. The name he had built up would go, would gradually dissipate, whilst he was learning drills and so on. It was obviously impossible to write in tents or barracks or wherever soldiers were . . . he was grotesquely vague on the point. The war might last twelve or even eighteen months and after that he would simply have to start again. Had he been wise in leaving the office?

He wondered.

It had been too late when he got to town to go to Veronica's office and once his evening meal was over he went to her little flat in St. Margaret's.

Veronica was not in. No one replied to his knock and rather disconsolately he turned away. He returned to town with only the vaguest intentions. He noticed a stream of people passing under the Admiralty Arch, and he followed them along the Mall to the great Palace at the end. Before the Palace the stream of people broadened out into a great crowd, a cheering, slightly-hysterical, crowd. For awhile he was unable to make out what it was all about and he spoke to a man at his side.

"'Is Majesty!'" was the reply. "Coming out on the balkerny."

And even as the man spoke the King and his consort stepped out, and were standing bowing to the now wildly shouting crowd. Other royalties were there. They seemed tiny, automatic figures at a great distance. Kennedy was sorry for them, without knowing why. Yet he knew that the crowd had seized on the little, bowing figures hungrily, as something which might stand for that great, looming, loved entity which was England, as a refuge for their wild emotions.

He turned away and with difficulty got out of the crowd. He made his way to a little club of which he

was a member, near the Circus . . . a very exotic, artistic little club. As he expected, he found several members there talking. . . . There was an air of detachment in the club, as if the members were something apart from the vague mass of ordinary people with uncontrollable, surging, crude emotions, outside. Here was subtlety in emotion . . . feeling . . . genius possibly, certainly an affectation of genius.

Kennedy joined the circle. A pale, thin, young man was talking. He wore partial side-whiskers, the Victorian mutton-chop whiskers, only not quite so Victorian as those; there was a faint delicacy about them. He stopped as Kennedy entered.

"Ah, here is our great author!" he said. "You are a stranger, Kennedy!"

"Yes . . . this war brought me back to town."

"So? That's a pity. One should not allow a superficial thing like a war to affect one. That is if one is an artist. War is for the unsubtle, the crude, the one-ideaed, the *herd*."

"It seems to me," said Kennedy, "that even Art is going to be very rudely shaken. . . ."

"Nothing can shake Art," said the fair young man. He lit a cigarette and one's attention was drawn to his beautiful, sensitive hands. "Art is of all time," he went on. "If one generation of people sees fit to muddle things with War, what does it matter if Art survive? After all, a nation merely exists in order to produce the Artist. Greece consisted of a few men who carried on the great tradition of Art. Greece is those men still. The mass of people who worked and made boots, houses, and what not, do not matter essentially, so long as the Artist is safeguarded. The western nations are fighting to safeguard Civilization we are told. That is possible. But Civilization is Art, and *WE* are Art. We

are that Civilization for which the herd is fighting.”

All this was said with an elaborate seriousness and with considerable assistance from those beautiful, eloquent hands. Most of the men there recognized the undercurrent of irony in the words, but so disturbed was Kennedy that he treated them seriously.

“My dear man,” he said. “If you and your like were swept away the race of which you speak so slightly will produce a thousand others like you. A knack of putting pigment on canvas doesn’t make you a race apart, and no prose or affectation will make you either more valuable or interesting than your fellows. The few people I have known who possess genius are not eternally talking about it.”

“Our author is annoyed. No Artist, my dear Kennedy, should ever be annoyed with anything.”

“Oh, go to Hell!” said Kennedy rudely, and in a very ugly temper he left the room, and the club.

Under normal conditions that little club prided itself on absolute freedom of the expression of opinions; it was another eddy from the maelstrom.

In a state of intense agitation Kennedy made his way to Max Bateman’s and he found him in. He was in the middle of an article and his table was littered with written sheets.

“What, you back?” he asked.

Kennedy nodded and sat down.

“Well?” he asked.

“It’s the devil!” said Bateman. “The very devil,” and a silence followed.

“Was there ever such damned folly?” cried Bateman. “In the twentieth century. These damned Emperors writing to each other. Nicholas and William! Nicholas and William! May . . . may they rot in hell! Everything is flung overboard. All hopes and possibil-

ities. It's just black chaos." After a pause he added, "I was at the Fabian Society to-night . . . they're all muddled." The anti-climax was so ludicrous that Kennedy laughed.

"They're the only people the war hasn't changed," he said, with a flash of his old humor. "It'll upset their schemes somewhat. I wonder if they'll go on with their little books now?"

"Probably," said Bateman. "There'll be more need than ever."

"Your sense of humor plays you false, Max, when you talk about the Fabian."

"If you attempt to pull my leg I shall get violent to-night," said Bateman. He altered his tone before he went on. "But, tell me, why did you return? What can you do?"

"Do? Why join the Army. . . . My dear chap, you don't quite appreciate what all this means. The devils are in Belgium, and it looks as if they'll be in Paris precious soon."

"Why abuse them? For Heaven's sake, Kennedy, do keep some sort of perspective. You must! You're a writer, a man who, presumably, thinks. You know as well as I do that *they* are in the main quite harmless and very hard-working people. It's their damned politicians and capitalists who have incited them, urged them on and appealed to every vile passion in them just as our own devils at home are doing. It's maddening. I feel as if I must run round in circles. In Germany you have the church, the press, the whole influential and governing classes, blackening England and Russia, and stirring up all the bad blood of passion in the people, shouting cant about patriotism, praying like steam engines, and creating hatred . . . *creating* hatred. And here it's the same. Clergy—damn them—politicians, the

whole dirty tribe of them, are at it insinuating, talking about spies and defending the motherland and the honor of their sisters, and all the bosh that is talked. It seems to me to be pathetically like two poor little boys fighting to amuse bigger boys. And here you are rushing into it without giving it two minutes' thought."

"I've given it hours of solid thought. . . . Look here, Bateman, you're wrong. We've done some pretty low-down things during our island story, I know—Africa, and all that—but as sure as the sun will rise in the morning we've no alternative but to go into this shambles with all our power. It's simple nonsense applying what you have said to Sir Edward Grey, for example. If ability and honesty could have avoided this war, he would have avoided it; you must know it."

Kennedy had spoken with heat, but Bateman spoke very quietly when he replied: "And I tell you," he said, "that the whole affair is ultimately caused and will be carried on by the two great groups of conflicting capitalists. Wherever you go you find their foul mark. Religion, politics, the press . . . everywhere you'll find the small group of capitalists, dominating, corrupting, inciting. It's these foul beasts struggling for power, and still more power. Neither the common people here nor in Germany wanted this war, and do not want it."

"I was in a crowd of common people to-night, outside Buckingham Palace," Kennedy replied.

"Pah!" said Bateman. "Sheep . . . that's all, sheep. . . . Middle class clerks and the like. Fed on the *Daily Mail* . . . the *people*, the thinking proletariat, are in the big industrial centers."

Kennedy would have replied, but Bateman rose from his table. "Drop it," he pleaded. "Really, I'm too upset to talk to you. I'll make some coffee and then

read to you for an hour. But for God's sake do think things over before you do anything rash."

He made the coffee and afterwards sat awhile on a hassock in front of the book-case which contained his poetry. In the soft light Kennedy noticed that his dark face was very pinched; he had never seen him so profoundly disturbed. It was Yeats he chose, and for awhile the quiet melancholy of the Irish poet lulled the two men. War became remote whilst Kennedy listened to the glorious lines; never had Bateman read the verse with such a subtle understanding.

He sighed when he had made an end, and put away the slender volume with an air of finality.

"With so much sadness in the world," he said (his words were part of the peculiar and haunting atmosphere the poetry had created), "men must still fly at each other's throats and kill and tear. . . ."

"If a wild beast flies at your throat you must defend yourself, Max."

"Yes . . . yes . . . that is also said in Germany, by Germans."

"It's no use our arguing, I can't see that," said Kennedy. "And this is my last word, to-night, anyway. You seem quite prepared to assume that every German motive is a decent one and at the same time to question every one of your own countrymen. . . . It's . . . It's morbid."

"You will be in Parliament yet, Maurice. You have their great gift . . . self-deception."

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders.

"One of us is deceiving himself," he said.

A little later he went.

The following morning he rang Veronica up and arranged to meet her at lunch. On his way to the station some fool-woman gave him a white feather. He took

it stupidly, for a moment not grasping its significance. Then he flushed violently and went on still with it in his hands. The lady's war work for the day was presumably done.

"Hallo!" Veronica greeted him. "I thought you'd come back. Sort of upsets things for you!"

"Very much!" he admitted.

They went to the little restaurant which the students of the Slade have decorated, and over the meal they discussed things.

Veronica had it on excellent authority that the bulk of the Regular Army was already in France, or at least on its way. Two men in her office had been mobilized with the Territorials and then, without warning or beating about the bush, she asked him what regiment he was joining.

"I hadn't thought definitely," he said. "Of course I shall join up. . . ."

"Of course!" she repeated. "Oh, if only I were a man!"

"What about the H.A.C.?" he asked.

"They're good," she said. "Or the Artists," she added. "You're certain of mixing with your own class there."

"I don't know that I want to," he said. "After all, as a writer I know men of my own class fairly well. I may as well get as much good out of the business as I can. I think I shall join an ordinary line regiment and get to know another class. It's a unique opportunity."

"You'll take a Commission, ultimately?" she asked.

"Really, Veronica, I haven't thought of the matter at all beyond deciding in my own mind to join up. There'll be plenty of time."

She had to hurry back to her office and when she had gone he was left with a vague feeling of unrest.

She seemed to have been disappointed in him. The old intimacy was not there. He might have lunched with a comparative stranger.

Obviously she expected him to join the Army at once. But things Bateman had said had unsettled him a little. He had not appreciated that there was a pacifist point of view. He thought steadily for awhile after she had left him and then went up to a policeman.

"Where do I enlist, constable?" he asked.

The constable told him unemotionally, and was unemotionally thanked.

He went into the big building to which he had been directed, and after what seemed a lot of unnecessary fuss he was sent away and told to come on the morrow. This he did and was duly prodded and sounded by the doctors before they pronounced him fit for a soldier. Afterwards he received one shilling and ninepence and was told to stand with certain other men. This he did for nearly an hour, at the end of which a sergeant led them away. The next day he left London and that night he slept on the floor of a town hall in a little town in the South of England. Two hundred and twenty other men slept with him. For the first time he was acutely conscious of the fact that he was a soldier in the Army of his Britannic Majesty.

Kit trickled through very slowly indeed to the new soldiers, and for awhile the drilling consisted mainly of marching; forever marching. His life seemed to have slipped away from him and to be receding into forgetfulness at a tremendous pace. He sometimes almost doubted his own identity. One evening in the reading room opened for the soldiers by the local chapel, he picked up a magazine with a story of his own in it. It was only with an effort that he could associate himself with the Maurice Kennedy of the magazine.

Organization began to protrude into his training. There were lectures. Once a sergeant, an old hand, lectured a hundred of the recruits on what he several times called "Clenlessness." The two men nearest to Kennedy had been, in civil life, an actor and a barrister, and the irony of the situation struck Kennedy. The sergeant's dirty finger nails and his quaint insistence on "Clenlessness" were rather delightful.

He told his experiences in a series of letters to Veronica, who treasured them. They were really good, some of them, and she urged him to attempt to publish them, but he would not. Her letters to him were characteristic. Once she offered to wash his socks if he met with any difficulty in getting them done, and announced that she was knitting him a pair (it was in the days when the agitation in the women of this country found its expression in knitting). Veronica offering to wash his socks was the most piquant result of the war, and Kennedy was delighted with it. Fortunately, however, he had found quite a good laundry in the town in which his training centered.

His Majesty's Post Office was responsible for a touch of irony a few weeks after Kennedy had stepped out of his old life. His late chief, almost snowed under by the influx of new work, wrote to him begging him to come back to the office. The letter had been sent to Fowey, thence to Richmond, and thence, vaguely, to the camp where he was training. It was a month old when at last he received it. He was just back from a route march when he discovered it. The chief said that he was sure Kennedy would be desirous of undertaking work of national importance, and that he would be pleased to hear from him by return.

He thought of the old days in the office, days which now would begin earlier and end later. He remembered

the inevitable morning train and the crowd in the evening. He visualized himself picking up interminable threads of work which had bored him for years.

"No bloomin' fear!" he said aloud, and went into the Canteen.

CHAPTER TWO

AFTER what seemed an eternity of training, Kennedy obtained a few days' leave.

London was quite different now that Kennedy was in uniform; he had an odd feeling, a slightly unsettling feeling, that he was in a strange city. Here and there were officers one had to salute. . . .

In buses old ladies beamed on one (it was in the days before a young man in civies was the exception) and time and again the good-looking Kennedy received what is technically known as the glad-eye. The abolition of rank, which is one of the oddest effects of uniform, led to amusing encounters in London, and cheerful working-girls who would not have dreamt of accosting the immaculate Kennedy of a few months before (in civilian life he affected a very austere type of pointed collar, and literary hats), asserted that his name was Charlie or Jimmie.

One of them spoke to him in the Charing Cross Road, where he was looking at second-hand books. He turned away from the particular shop without buying anything and a girl at his elbow spoke to him.

"D'yer want that book, matey?" she asked.

"Eh . . . no, not particularly," said the startled Kennedy.

"I'll buy it for yer if yer do," she went on calmly. "You chaps 'aven't any spare tin, I know."

"I say, it's very good of you," said the violently blushing Kennedy, who was taken entirely by surprise.

"But I really don't want it. Thanks awfully, anyway."

"I didn't know . . ." she commenced awkwardly.

"Not at all," said Kennedy vaguely. "It's very decent of you." He saluted and went his way. The girl had smelt of vinegar—she evidently worked at the great preserve factory up the road—and had been actuated by pure kindness. She was greatly disconcerted by his voice, when he had replied to her.

Kennedy smiled as he wandered past the bookshops. "Jolly decent of her, anyway," he mused.

Half-way up the Charing Cross Road on the right from Trafalgar Square is a little red bookshop where one can buy all kinds of "advanced" books and pamphlets. One sees strange-looking people in that little shop, people with wild eyes and wilder hats, people who form an odd contrast with the spectacled, mild-eyed proprietor. Kennedy went into the shop as he usually did when he was in the neighborhood. At the far end of the shop, talking to the bookseller, was Max Bateman.

"Hallo!" said Kennedy, coming up behind.

Bateman looked at him for a moment, with even eyes which gradually broke into a smile. He held out his hand.

"Et tu, Brute!" he said.

"Yes . . . even I!" laughed Kennedy.

"Where's your gun?" asked Bateman. . . . "You ought to be shooting somebody, surely!"

"Don't be an ass, Max," said Kennedy.

"Why not? You've no more quarrel with the poor German working men you'll be shooting presently, than you have with that old lady across the road. You don't even know either of them. Why not shoot the one as much as the other?"

"Cheerful chap!" said Kennedy to the bookseller, whom he knew well.

The latter smiled, but said nothing.

"I was on my way to lunch," said Kennedy.

"Good . . . if you don't mind lunching with a mere civilian, I'll come along too."

"You know, Max, you talk through the back of your head over this business," Kennedy said, as they strolled along the Charing Cross Road. "You do, really! Take that old lady, for instance, whom you wanted me to shoot. Apart from the tactlessness of going about shooting promiscuously at old ladies, your argument that I have no more quarrel with her than I have with the Germans simply isn't sound. England is at war with Germany, she is not at war with old ladies. I happen to be an Englishman."

"Yes. You are an Englishman, Maurice, almost the most English Englishman I know."

"But you admit that your argument was bosh?" Kennedy insisted.

"I do not," said Bateman with emphasis. "You have no more quarrel with the German boys you will kill than they have with you, or than you have with that dear old lady. When you say that 'England is at war with Germany and I am an Englishman,' it sounds very fine. It would bring the house down. What it means is that a small group of cynical old gentlemen who pretend to represent England have fallen out with a still more cynical group of old Germans, and forthwith men like you and German boys like Paul Hintze—you remember him?—promptly proceed to kill each other. If you joined together to kill the mouthing old beasts who had quarreled out of sheer senile incapacity to behave themselves with average decency, I would join you with gusto."

"Really, Max, you must pull up. This is simply confusion of thought."

"Confusion of thought?" Bateman repeated the phrase before he went on. "England and Germany, the two great civilized powers of the world, are at each other's throats like snarling dogs, and I say that if the men who had taken to themselves power had been actuated by ordinary ability and decency, war would have been impossible. You are an Englishman, Paul Hintze is a German. Can you give me one sane reason why you should fight each other?"

"Yes. I like Hintze as a man. I loathe him as a German."

Bateman sighed heavily.

"How can you like him as a man and loathe him as a German?"

"Well, socially and intellectually, Hintze was amusing. Intellectually, as you know, his ideas were all wrong . . . they were beastly, the Superman rot, and Nietzsche business. Do you remember his quoting that mad German Jew: 'Strike that which is falling!'"

"Yes. His meaning—Nietzsche's meaning—was that if a thing is dying, cancerous, degenerate, it is kinder to strike it down than to let it linger in misery and decay."

"And you think, seriously, that kindness is the underlying motive in Nietzsche's phrase? 'Strike that which is falling!' You, a Socialist to talk so!"

"But you've side-tracked the argument, Maurice—here's the café. You'll dine with me? Good." Bateman ordered lunch and a bottle of wine. With a twinkle in his eye he asked Maurice if he minded German wine.

"Good Heavens, no!" said Maurice. "Why should I? There are one or two good things which come out of Germany. When that unhappy country has paid

her debt to Civilization and Humanity, good may yet again come from Germany. Hock, by all means, my dear Max."

They talked reminiscently during the meal, of Fanny and Esther Pensimmon, and the old days, but with the coffee the great question between them came uppermost again.

"You know, Maurice—thank God we can still argue like gentlemen even though the question verges on the personal all the time—you know, you didn't explain how you could like Hintze as a man, and loathe him as a German."

"No, we got on to Nietzsche. Well, as a man, I found him amusing." Kennedy hesitated a moment. "Even interesting," he went on. "He was frank, like a child, and made no secret of the sinister views he had imbibed. In an Englishman such views are eccentric—a phase through which young men—clever young men—pass. It's like measles . . . there was a time when I professed to be Nietzschean. But with your German—even with Hintze—these views are ingrained, part of them. They hold them profoundly, like a religion."

"You call them sinister. What of the views of the ordinary Englishman? Boys of the bulldog breed, Britannia rules the waves, and so on. It's the same gospel of force, excepting that in Germany they were stated by a philosopher and poet." Bateman spoke with bitterness.

"Exactly," agreed Kennedy. "The sentiments which tipsy Englishmen mouth in the pothouses, and which are mere exuberance or nonsense, are elevated to a philosophy in Germany . . . a philosophy of the ruling clique there, a philosophy which you see translated into action. In practice 'Strike that which is falling' becomes, Strike that which is weak or anything which gets in

one's way. Just strike! Belgium is now the classic example. The ultimate, the perfect example of the gospel of force, of unmoralism, is the tiger that springs and strikes at its prey. Whether it's an antelope drinking at a spring, or poor little Belgium, it's the same in principle. But we leave poor Hintze again. You see why I found him amusing as a man? As a German I find he stands for a philosophy which is turning the world into a shambles, in order that Force may reign. I—as an Englishman—stand for something quite different, so different, indeed, that quite calmly and dispassionately I think life itself would be intolerable if the philosophy I loathe were superimposed on it."

"You talk of Belgium . . . Germany struck also at Russia remember. Between that inchoate, inarticulate, semi-barbaric mass and France, a France living only for revenge—her national existence was at stake. Her very geographical position forced her to be a military power just as ours forced us to be a naval one."

"Quite so . . . and when was the last time our Navy was used as an offensive force . . .?" asked Kennedy.

"It's always dominated the world as a latent offensive force, capable of striking instantly; in any case the German people have been at peace for fifty years . . . there is South Africa and a dozen other thievings during that time on the part of this peace-loving race. Besides . . . and this is the great fact in the Pacifist position, the war is purely a capitalist undertaking. It is, in essence, a struggle for World Trade. Germany had only to go on for another twenty years as she has been going, to become the first Power in the world without striking a blow. And yet, you want me to believe that she deliberately risked this certainty on a gambler's throw which would plunge the world into blood and exasperate all her best customers. Is it not more likely

that the power who had caused to fear her commercial expansion forced the war on her!"

"Belgium! Serbia! Luxemburg!" asked Kennedy scornfully.

"No. England! England!! England!!!" Bateman brought his hand down heavily on the table, and people lunching near-by glanced up. His face was animated and his dark eyes bright.

"The British Army was negligible," Kennedy pointed out.

"Agreed, but always you have had a group of people howling for conscription. This war will give it to them."

"That is inevitable," said Kennedy calmly. "It will not be the least of our sacrifices. We shall have to steel ourselves to losses on a Continental scale."

"Not if there's any sanity left in my fellow-countrymen," said Bateman quietly. "Conscription would be going a little too far even for the militarists. You destroy militarism in Germany by creating it here! A pretty argument."

"If that is the only way we must do it," said Kennedy imperturbably.

"And in Germany, my dear Maurice," said Bateman, suddenly cool, "there are men talking as you talk. Look, they will be saying, England is throttling us. The Fatherland is at stake. We are beset by enemies. We must strain every nerve, make every sacrifice. And the beastly little Kaiser, with his withered arm, will go on successfully preaching his absurd gospel of Force. The result will be that two people who, excepting for their damned diplomats and damnable capitalists, would be living in amity, will tear each other's throats until one or both falls exhausted. And this in the twentieth century of Christianity. Both these peoples are Christian

... the niggers on the Congo who look on in amusement are blind heathens bowing down to wood and stone, to whom we, *WE*, send missionaries. Great God in heaven ... it's ... it's ... " Words at last failed him.

"I'm afraid we don't see eye to eye," said Kennedy mildly.

"I'm glad you see that," said Bateman sarcastically. "I suppose it's foolish to argue," he added, in another spirit. "We're poles apart. 'Islands shouting to each other across seas of misunderstanding,' as R. L. S. said."

"Stevenson did not love the Germans," said Kennedy, with a smile.

"Oh, let's stop arguing, Maurice," said Bateman. "Come on home with me for an hour and see Fanny." He called the waiter and paid the bill, and the two set out.

Fanny had not expected her husband in so early and was out when they arrived. They went up to Bateman's room, the only difference in which, as far as Kennedy could see, was the greater number of papers and pamphlets about. Many of them, he noticed, were more or less Pacifist in character.

They talked awhile of books and men in that quaint world of books where nothing is quite real, and then—a touch of reality—Fanny came in. She was delighted to see Kennedy again, and proceeded to make tea. She chatted amiably during the meal. She never once referred to the uniform that Kennedy was wearing, or to the war.

Kennedy had to go quite early as he was meeting Veronica Ward, but before he did so, Bateman bridged the gulf between the old days and the new, by picking up a slender volume of verse from a little tray by his side.

"By the way, Kennedy, have you heard this?" he said.

"I've heard nothing for weeks and weeks," said Kennedy quietly. "Like that, anyway."

It was a book of a minor poet which he had picked up somewhere and he read with all his old charm.

"They can't kill that," he said, when at last he had finished. "Poetry is the essence of man's spirit. They may smash his body up on a thousand battlefields, but this, his spirit"—he tapped the book as he was speaking—"will live and will rise up when sanity comes back to earth. It will rise up and those who have plunged the youth of the world into blood, bloodily shall pay for what they have done."

"They will pay," said Kennedy quietly. The poetry Bateman had read had touched him deeply. "They will pay," he said again. "Those who have plunged the world in blood, England will see that they pay."

But that had not been Bateman's meaning.

CHAPTER THREE

THE next leave Kennedy obtained was the last prior to his inclusion in a draft for the Front. He got to town in the early afternoon and as he was not meeting Veronica until six o'clock, he was able to carry out an intention he had formed some time before. He went to a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn with whom he had done business over his legacy, and made his will. Only Kennedy and the solicitor knew what was in the will.

He told Veronica what he had done. "It's only a formality," he added, noticing the look which flashed into her face.

"Of course . . ." she agreed, but none the less it was some time before she quite overcame the shock, for all her cheerful, careless air. She knew he knew that she was upset, and was annoyed with herself.

It was necessary to raise her spirits.

"It's all nonsense," he said banteringly. "You go on pretending, my dear Veronica, that you are devoted whole-heartedly to that career of yours. You are really in love with me."

"I'm sufficiently fond of you not to like the association of making a will and your own conceited self."

"That's a grudging admission," he went on in the same spirit. "Why not admit facts gracefully? Since I've been in uniform I have seen a distinct change in you. You women are all alike. The housemaid before the war might look askance on the greengrocer man, but if he enlisted he never appealed in vain."

"There is a fascination in a uniform," she admitted.

"There must be if what you say is true," she added wickedly.

"Touché," he laughed.

It suddenly struck her that she had no right to be low spirited, no matter how unpleasant the shock of the association, in the same thought, of Maurice Kennedy and death. Here was a soldier going to France with a few fleeting days in London. Here was she, the girl he had asked to meet him, the girl with whom he imagined he would have a good time.

She dropped the mood which had come to her as if it had been a garment, and became the Veronica he knew. Not another hitch occurred. He kissed her in the taxi, he kissed her when they parted. He would have kissed her in the train had they been alone.

She let him kiss her.

"Leave" was too short to argue about things like kissing.

The last evening in town he dined with his parents and Veronica at Gatti's in the Strand, the restaurant at which his father liked to dine on all ceremonial occasions. It was, on the whole, in spite of Mrs. Kennedy's tact, rather a dull meal. Maurice strove desperately to liven things up; even Veronica was very quiet.

Mr. Kennedy talked of his old office, where (as in all other Government offices) the war was apparently being won . . . of the mass of work there, and so on. It was not an inspiring theme. Mrs. Kennedy discussed papers with Veronica, and Maurice strove by telling stories to rescue the conversation from shop. Mr. Kennedy referred to Veronica as "your young lady-friend," which description delighted both Veronica and his son. Mrs. Kennedy was more discreetly, and perhaps more subtly, amused, but she was never openly amused by her husband in his serious moments.

Afterwards the four of them went to the Alhambra, where Robey thawed even the massive-minded official. Mr. Kennedy pulled himself up sharply when he found himself laughing at the comedian in his broader moments, and that was not the least amusing part of the evening. It was Veronica who had suggested the Alhambra. She had foreseen the evening, and had faith in Robey.

"Quite amusing, quite," Mr. Kennedy conceded at the end.

From the Alhambra it was rather a rush to get Maurice's train, which also Veronica had foreseen, knowing as she did (and she had a fairly comprehensive knowledge of Kennedy) that he would hate anything in the nature of a scene.

Four minutes remained only when the taxi got them to the station. He might, as his father pointed out inevitably, easily have missed the train.

"Well, good-by, Veronica," he said cheerfully.

"Good-by, Maurice . . . and all the luck in the world." She pressed his hand very lightly.

"Good-by, Mater."

"Good-by, Maurice . . . good-by." She kissed him passionately and for a second looked intently into his eyes. "Good bless you," she added lamely.

"Good-by, Pater."

"Good-by, my son. May God bring you back to us."

To Kennedy's surprise he saw that his father, the staid unemotional official, was crying. Tears streamed down his face . . . he had never suspected his father of deep feeling, and was a little upset.

"Good-by," he smiled, and without more words turned hurriedly away.

The three he had left watched him swallowed up by

the sinister train; whistles and slammed doors were heard and the train was moving.

Mr. Kennedy had broken down completely, and his wife (weeping also now that Maurice had gone and there was no imperative reason why she shouldn't) linked her arm in his.

Veronica took them to the hotel where they were staying for the night and there left them.

"Good-by, Veronica," said Mrs. Kennedy. "I am very grateful for all you have done for my boy. . . ."

Arrived at her tiny flat Veronica lit the little gas fire and made herself some cocoa. She sat in her coat and hat in the little low chair, and slowly sipped the beverage, looking down into the fire the while. But there is no inspiration in a gas fire, no refuge for one's thoughts as there is in an ordinary fire. It was quite a time afterwards when Veronica discovered that she was still sitting holding an empty cocoa cup, and looking down into the smoothly-burning, unresponsive fire.

Six days later Veronica and Mrs. Kennedy received field post cards. The former's was flippantly deleted and read that Maurice was quite well and hoped to be discharged soon. His mother's told her he was quite well, which had become the greatest desire in her life.

Mr. Kennedy examined the card with characteristic care and minuteness when he came home, but he obtained no further information from it.

"Thank God!" he said, after quite a lengthy examination.

CHAPTER FOUR

AND then for awhile very little was heard from Maurice Kennedy. He had disappeared entirely from the life which had known him, and the world went on as if he and the hundreds of thousands who were with him made no matter. Their places were all quietly filled by the women and the old men, who came forward very briskly.

Max Bateman was one of the comparatively few young men who followed the even tenor of his way. His sullen resentment deepened as the weeks went by, and his work became more and more bitter, until the most daring editor hesitated.

Bateman imagined conspiracies.

If the editor who rejected his too outspoken manuscript, or who suggested modifications, happened to be a man above military age, he saw an attempt on the part of the old men who were gaining by the war to thwart the expression of the young man's point of view, an attempt to stifle youth. It became an obsession with him. He came almost to loathe old men. "They *give* their sons," he would say. "But they insist on the five or six per cent. on their money. *Give* their sons indeed. Damn the old beasts' impudence, the sons give themselves."

The obsession grew.

In restaurants Bateman would look around and if an elderly man were dining with a girl it would start him off.

"The boy she naturally belongs to," he would say,

"is in France. That old devil has had his life, has had his generation, and is seizing on the boy's absence, on the agony of youth to have his turn over again. . . . The old men made the war and it has removed all effective competition from their lives. They can get more money, they can get the girls who belong to the generation which is being blown into the mud of Flanders, and who would naturally prefer boys of their own age to these flatulent old swine. . . . Look at that white-haired old sepulchre, aping being a soldier. Look at his beautiful, *spotless* khaki, his immaculate boots and his cunning little eyes devouring the girl at his table. Her boy is probably killed, or being killed, and that beast in whom the sweetness of youth is dead is clutching at the rights of youth . . . and running the war. I'll bet that old gentleman is prepared to go on fighting until the last drop of the blood of youth is spilt. He's a patriot . . . pah! He stinks!"

He was lunching one day with a man on the *New Era*, a man a few years older than himself who was unfit for the Army, when he let off similar steam.

"Sweetness of youth?" The journalist had seized on the phrase. "You don't seem very dulcified yourself, my dear Bateman. You're acidulated. You want a cooling mixture. The old gentleman is possibly her father, or uncle. He might even have been sorry for her being lonely and taken her out to buck her up a little. . . ."

"He might," said Bateman, "Look at him . . . unintelligent, violent, crude, aping youth."

"I've never known *you* quite as violent before," the other said, with a smile. "Besides, that girl can look after herself. She'll probably take all the old gentleman cares to spend on her, and then write an amusing letter to her boy in France, if she's got one, and if he's

there. Youth doesn't give up what you call its privileges as easily as you imagine."

"The one undisputed privilege of youth is Life . . . and it is Life which youth is giving up in a war in which the men and boys whose lives are being flung away had not a word to say."

"The little truth in what you say is common to all wars. After all, statesmen must be fairly old men. . . ."

"The world would be a better place if no man over fifty had any power at all."

"It would be an amusing place, I think."

"Possibly. It isn't at the moment. I would rather it were amusing, grotesque, anything but gauntly tragic."

"Ah well," the journalist said, "after all, *we* are young men and we haven't made any extraordinary sacrifice. . . . This is rather good coffee."

Bateman walked back to his flat thoughtfully, resentfully. A hectic placard met his eyes and a shudder passed through him. "My God!" he muttered.

He found a soldier with Fanny.

"I'm glad you've come in, Max," she said. "This is George . . . my brother."

"How are you, George?" Bateman asked. "I've often heard Fanny speak of you."

"I'm all right, thank yer," said George, who was extremely self-conscious in his unaccustomed surroundings. "I'd just dropped in to say good-by to Fanny. . . ."

"Are you going away?"

"In a day or so; I'm on final leave. France, I expect. The missus is a bit upset?"

"You should have brought her with you," Bateman said.

He was a little awkward. The soldier was a working man, a plumber, and it was obvious that he really wanted to call Bateman "sir." Fanny had warned him not to.

"Yes. I might 'ave done," he agreed. "She'd 'ave bin interested in this little place. I never thought as 'ow little Fanny would 'ave a place like this. A rum world, ain't it?"

"It's a mad world," said Bateman vehemently.

"It's at a bit of a loose end along now, anyway," said George, who did not understand the passion in his brother-in-law's voice.

After George had gone Bateman abused the war machine which tore so simple and useful a man from his family and his work. He abused the old men whom he alleged were the cause of it all. Poor Fanny had listened to a great deal of such abuse. The war, she thought, had brought all the violence in Max's nature to the surface.

During an interval she spoke.

"You're going to that meeting in St. Pancras?" she asked, and her anxiety was obvious.

"Yes, dear," he said firmly.

"The paper this morning says there will be a riot there, that the pacifists will be mobbed."

"Don't you believe it! The paper is bound to say that. It's only some old gentleman on the paper suggesting such things to his ignorant readers. Of course, he puts it as if he were afraid it might happen. In his evil, cunning old mind, he knows that people will probably create a disturbance if enough old gentlemen say they are afraid disturbances will happen. It's a plant. . . ."

"Still I wish you wouldn't go, Max. I do really!"

"But I must, dear. I'm down to speak there. I'm not afraid of the Jingoës . . . the old gentlemen *want* to choke us off."

Fanny said no more. She knew enough of her husband to know that it was useless, but her eyes were on his face that evening when he went.

"You *will* be careful, dear, won't you? You *do* say such dreadful things. . . ."

He laughed. "Of course, I'll be careful, Fanny." He kissed her and was gone.

The meeting was due to commence at eight and had achieved some little notoriety. A Member of Parliament was speaking, a member whose name, to put the truth mildly, was not popular at the moment. Attempts had been made to prohibit the meeting, but had failed.

When Bateman entered the hall it was nearly full, and the audience was singing flagrantly patriotic songs, robustly; there were a good many soldiers there. He found the M.P. and half a dozen others in a little room behind the platform. They were all elaborately cool, elaborately at their ease, and, on the stroke of eight, they followed the chairman on to the platform, where they were greeted with cat-calls and abuse.

Obviously the meeting might very easily get out of hand.

The chairman, a broad-shouldered Socialist with a square face and a big loose mouth, was standing facing the growing uproar. The noise grew deafening as cheers were called, in the body of the hall, for the King, General French, Admiral Jellicoe, Mr. Bottomley, and other popular figures.

The chairman made desperate attempts to raise his voice above the din.

"We are here to-night . . ." he commenced, in a comparative lull.

"Liar!" came from the hall, followed by an outbreak of noise which drowned all words.

Some one started singing Tipperary, and if eight hundred excited people are singing that very exclusive song, even a square-faced Socialist cannot make himself heard.

From sheer exhaustion qualified quiet came.

"To put before you, quietly and reasonably," the chairman went on, unemotionally, as if he had not been interrupted.

"'Oo pays yer?" a voice demanded, and another voice, thin and penetrating, "Blarsted 'Uns!" The thin penetrating voice detached itself from the hullabaloo but apparently was only capable of that one phrase. "Blarsted 'Uns!" . . . "*Blarsted* 'Uns!" It was a voice which would go through a sheet of tin, and it kept on steadily, "Blarsted 'Uns! . . . Blarsted 'Uns!"

The M.P. leaned forward and said something to the Chairman, who nodded. The M.P. smiled with a really good impression of unconcern. Bateman sat with folded arms facing the crowd, which was rapidly getting out of hand. His face was tense and white. A woman in the front row hissed something at him; he saw her pointing excitedly at him.

Some one had mounted a chair in the hall and was speaking, or rather shouting. He put some form of resolution which apparently met with approval. The turmoil increased, and suddenly the hall seemed to fill with police, stolid, unemotional police, who regarded the raging noise around them cheerfully. An inspector came up to the platform and said something to the chairman . . . it was obvious now that the M.P. was a little scared. The chairman spoke to the M.P. and the two of them left the platform and passed into a room behind it. Most of the people on the platform followed their example and their exit was greeted by a pande-

monium of noise. The inspector spoke to Bateman, who was of those who had remained.

"I should not stay here, sir, if I were you. The crowd may easily get out of hand."

Bateman shrugged his shoulders; the woman who had hissed unintelligible words at him pushed her way to the edge of the platform, shaking her fist at him.

Reluctantly he rose and followed the others into the room beyond. It was undignified, exceedingly undignified, and inside he found a group of white-faced men, scared by the tornado of noise a few yards away. Bateman himself was appalled by the violent passions the meeting had called up, he could not understand it . . . there were young men, too, and soldiers.

The M.P. spoke to him, affecting a coolness which his face belied.

"Rather hopeless, Bateman, what? A voice in the wilderness! Have you read Gustave le Bon's 'Psychology of the Crowd'?"

"Blood-lust," said Bateman fiercely. "My God, and the same mad passions are being loosed in Germany by the vicious old men there." He pulled himself up. The M.P. was an elderly man. "I beg your pardon," said Bateman.

"Not at all," said the M.P., and smiled.

The tactful inspector got them away by a little-known door and breathed a big sigh of relief once they were gone. Bateman found Fanny waiting him, white-faced and anxious.

"Thank Heaven you've come, Max. I imagined awful things happening."

"The meeting was a bit lively . . . the people are inflamed by the patriotic press. . . ."

"I wish sometimes you were a little more ordinary, Max. People misunderstand you."

"You really need not be nervous. The safest place in the world is in the middle of an English crowd."

"They threw a man into the pond one day on Clapham Common. I saw him crawling out . . . all wet. Max, dear, what good does it all do? What can you do if the mass of people are against you?"

"Protest at least. Even if one is not listened to one has not acquiesced in rottenness . . . one still has one's self-respect."

"There's a letter for you, Max . . . I forgot for the moment." It was on his desk and a slight frown crossed his face as he glanced at it.

"It's from my sister," he said.

She said nothing but her face became whiter as she watched him open the letter. The frown on his face deepened as he read.

"My brother has been killed," he said. "He was in the Army before the War. . . . A Regular officer. My sister wants me to go home. My father is ill." He spoke jerkily, nervously.

Still she said nothing.

"It's too late to-night," he said. "The last train is absurdly early."

Both were still standing and he held the letter as if he were still reading it.

"I haven't seen any of them excepting my brother for years," he said. . . . "We had separated." He spoke as if the whole affair were utterly remote from him. "I remember him at school," he went on, speaking of his brother. "He was in the fifteen. . . . I hated everything he valued, and he what I valued. He was in the Artillery. . . ."

There was something cold in his voice which frightened her. She longed to say something to him . . . to know what he felt.

He realized suddenly that he was standing and sat down, leaning forward, head on hand. She crouched down by his side, holding his arm with both her hands.

"Max . . ." she said brokenly, but got no farther.

He stroked her brown hair.

"God, how I've disappointed the old Pater," he said aloud. "I'm disappointing everybody, I believe—there's Kennedy. . . ."

"I love you," she said eagerly, "I always shall. The others don't understand you."

"The Pater's very ill, my sister says. . . ."

"You must go first thing in the morning, Max."

"Yes. I'll go to bed, now, I think, Fanny. . . . I'm all wrong to-night. Good-night, little woman."

She kissed him passionately, and quite suddenly stood away from him. Once the door was closed behind him she sank into the chair he had left and burst into tears. It was partly the long evening of anxiety, partly . . . but who shall analyze a woman's tears?

The following morning he went. In the dim hall she straightened his bow and kissed him. He was going when she put her hand on his sleeve. "Max . . ." she said.

"Yes, dear," he urged.

"I want you to do what you think is your duty. I don't want you to bother about me. . . . I couldn't be happy if I had made you do anything you didn't want to."

"What's come over you, Fanny?" he asked in surprise.

"I've been thinking things over during the night, Max. Now you must go. . . . Good-by!"

He kissed her wonderingly, and heard her close the door behind him.

CHAPTER FIVE

BATEMAN alighted at the tiny Leicestershire station and looked up and down the platform. A lady came out of the waiting-room and crossed to him. Recognition flashed into his face after a momentary hesitation.

"Mary!" he said.

"Yes, Max. I'm so glad you've come. . . . I was afraid. . . ."

"Yes, I know. How is Pater?"

"Very bad. I've got the carriage here."

"Does he know you asked me to come?"

"Yes. He told me to ask you."

He followed her along the platform and found the ancient carriage and the same ancient groom, who touched his hat hesitatingly to Bateman.

"Morning, Tom," Bateman said.

"Max," his sister commenced, "You must be careful with the Pater. He's very ill indeed. Since . . . we heard . . . he's been sinking." Bateman saw that his sister's eyes filled with tears.

He patted her hand awkwardly.

"I promise you, Mary," he said. For awhile neither spoke. Even after ten years he knew the road, for it was interwoven with the memories of his childhood. He had walked the four miles between the station and his father's home a thousand times in the old days. Half-forgotten faces he passed sprang back into his memory with a wealth of detail.

"Nothing's changed!" he said.

"Things don't . . . here," his sister replied, in a quiet voice.

She was some years older than he, and already her dark hair had traces of gray in it. Her life had been one of devotion to her father and brother; she had taken the dead mother's place uncomplainingly and had lived uneventfully save for the series of disturbances which culminated in Max leaving his home ten years before. Even into her quiet life the war had entered and clouded her outlook with tragedy. The soldier brother had been in every way her favorite, as he was her father's, and his death had left her with a sense of having lived in vain.

For years Max's name had not been mentioned in his father's house. From time to time his name would crop up in some paper or other; usually in connection with speeches, or views which in his father's opinion were little less than shameful.

"They wired . . ." she said, after a silence. "I can't see why they should wire . . . why can't the War Office write? A wire's such a fearful shock."

For a moment he didn't grasp that she was referring to their brother's death.

"Poor old Ronald!" he said.

"Mr. Thorrock is to preach a special sermon about him," she said. "Everywhere one receives the greatest sympathy. There have been four men in the village killed already." She detailed the information mechanically. She was fighting to keep her tears back.

He caught a first glimpse of his old home through the trees, with an odd feeling.

"It's a beautiful old place, Mary," he said. He found it extremely difficult to talk to his sister.

Mrs. Blake, the elderly housekeeper, met them in the hall.

"I'm glad you've come back, Master Max," she said, and he saw that she, too, was full of tears. "Lunch is ready, Miss," she said to his sister.

"I thought you'd rather not see father till after lunch," she said.

"Just as you like, Mary," he agreed.

Brother and sister lunched together in the old dining room, from the windows of which the thatched houses of the villages might be seen. Again nothing had changed. He remembered the table silver, the heavy ticking of the great, black clock over the fireplace, the crushing, overpowering pictures. Conversation was desultory. Brother and sister touched nowhere, and he knew that in her heart she was hostile to him.

"Shall I see if father's awake?" she asked.

"If you will, Mary."

Left alone he wandered round the room and found a hundred things which had remained in his subconscious mind. Suddenly, she was in the room again.

"He is awake," she said, "and is anxious to see you, Max . . . you will be careful. You know of old, how . . ."

"You need have no fear, Mary. I will be careful."

He tapped at his father's room and entered. The heavy curtains were drawn and the light was very dim. He saw his father with difficulty, a white, thin face on the pillows. The change in ten years was startling.

"Will you open the curtains a little? I can't see you. . . ." It was his father's voice, older and weaker, but unmistakably his father's voice. He did as he was asked.

"I have come, Pater," Max said. "I was terribly shocked to hear of poor Ronald."

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," the old man said. "Max, I am dying . . ."

"No, Pater!" His shocked surprise was in his words.

"Yes. All the talk, all the cleverness in the world, cannot shade away the fact of death, and I am clearly conscious that my time is almost here. I'm not afraid of death, my son—you are my son—any more than your brother was afraid of death. I have sent for you, Max, because I had something to say to you."

Bateman remained standing in silence. He was more affected than he would have cared to admit.

"You have been the disappointment of my life, but we need not go into that. In these later years I have seen that what you did, you had to do; and I am no longer bitter." His words died away and still his son stood mute in exquisite awkwardness. Words failed him as they invariably do when a man is deeply moved; he only knew vaguely what his father had said. The quiet, calm certainty in the voice had shown him that his father was indeed dying, his father, the man whose voice and sureness were interwoven with all the tender, intimate memories of the other days. The thwarting, the desire to limit, the long, insistent attempt to bend his will to another's, the bitterness, culminating in revolt, were forgotten. It was the father of his childhood who had come back to him. The father of his mature years was already dead.

The silence, the conscious silence in the big, dim bedroom was broken by the older man.

"This was sent to me by post the other day, Max." He indicated feebly a paper on a table at the bedside, and Bateman recognized it at once. It was a paper for which he wrote frequently, and if it were the current number it contained an outspokenly pacifist article he had written.

"It came," the father went on, "not an hour before the wire announcing your brother's death in France."

There was nothing for Bateman to say.

"I read it . . . your work, my son's work."

"Yes," Bateman said again. "I wrote it. It is what I believe . . ."

"I am too weak to argue, Max," the elder man replied. . . . "But these last months I have done more thinking than I have ever done in my life. With your brother in France, I had to be certain in my own soul that the sacrifice I was making. . . . I know what you said here about the old men," he indicated the journal which contained Max's article as he was speaking. "But whether you believe it or no, if I could have given my life to save Ronald, I would gladly, *gladly* have done so. I had to be certain, I say, in my own soul that this sacrifice was right. I strove desperately to see the German point of view. *They have none*. Deliberately they brought about this war with deliberate ends in view, and everything we hold sacred was at stake. I am certain, with the clearness of a dying man, that my son died defending his home, defending his country. I could not die calmly if it were not so. Thank God, it is. These sinister doubts are untrue. There is no doubt . . . there is *no* doubt."

Bateman still remained silent, and when his father continued he spoke more calmly:—

"I have sent for you, Max, to ask you to cease writing in this strain. It is wrong. If it were true, I would not mind. With your love of Justice and Truth—and I see now that you have that; your whole life shows it—you must see that in the matter of this war your brother died in a great cause, that your country is right. I have appealed before, in the past, in vain, to your sense of duty to me. I appeal now to that sense of Justice which I know you to possess. Had we left France to her fate . . . it is unthinkable!"

After a pause the father went on:—

"I don't ask you to join the Army, you are not the stuff of which soldiers are made, although your ancestors for generations have been soldiers. But the blood in you is *English*. . . ."

The thin voice was raised and again excited.

"Of course, my blood is English . . . Pater," Bateman said.

With an effort his father raised himself in bed. He was very fragile and white, and altogether different from the father of Bateman's memories.

"I am not appealing to you as your father. I am appealing to that passion for fairness which is part of you. . . . Your mother was the same. . . . Don't mistake me.

"Will you promise about that writing?"

"Will you promise me?" The urgent voice demanded again.

"Yes," Bateman said quietly. Instinct prevailed, and he slipped his arm under his father and lowered him gently. The elder man was breathing heavily. His weakness had succeeded in imposing his will on his son where his strength had always failed; perhaps it was a new kind of strength.

Bateman left the room quietly to find his sister in the corridor. Her eyes were wide and scared.

"Is he all right?" she demanded.

"He's very weak," he said.

She tapped at a door opposite and a nurse in uniform joined her. The two of them went into her father's room. Bateman found his way back to the dining room where he waited.

Half an hour later his sister joined him.

"He's a little better," she said. "He's calmer . . . he said it was all right, that whatever you did he had

never known you to break your word. What does he mean? He's talking to himself, I think."

"He insisted on my promising not to write any more Pacifist articles. . . . I think he would have collapsed if I had not promised."

"You did promise?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I had to . . ." he said. "It would have struck at the faith which buoys him, I think, if I hadn't."

"You'll stay here to-night, Max?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes. Pater will probably be better in the morning. I told Fanny I should possibly not return until to-morrow."

He slept that night in his old bedroom. There also nothing had changed. It was as if nothing ever did change in his boyhood's home.

It was light when he awoke to find his sister standing over him, some sort of a wrap flung hurriedly round her shoulders. Her scared face startled him into consciousness with a jerk.

"He's dying," she said breathlessly. "Come! He sent for you!"

He followed her along a forgotten corridor into his father's room. On the bed he saw his father's face again. The eyes were closed. Obeying some deep instinct he sank to his knees by the side of the bed, as if the bitterness of the years had never been. Sister and nurse stood watching. The father's eyes opened. He looked at his son and with an effort raised his hand to Max's shoulder, where it remained. He spoke no word, but slowly his eyes closed again; the hand sank limply to the bedclothes; the whole body was relaxed and effortless; the face was calm. In a haze Bateman knew that his father was dead;—that he had found peace was clear in his face.

His sister's sobs seemed to him to come from a great distance.

The next few days were very blurred in Bateman's memory. He wired to Fanny. His sister had wanted him to ask her to come, but several reasons had prevented him. A simple service in the little gray, squat church touched Bateman profoundly, and afterwards by his sister's side he watched his father lowered into his last bed. His sister had clung to his arm. . . .

His father's solicitor was very deferential to him. His father had died intestate, and Bateman was not only Squire of Rearston and owner of Rearston Hall, but a wealthy man in addition.

"I shan't live here, Mary. I'm out of touch with it all," he said. "You'd better stay on!"

"But your wife?" she asked.

"Oh, Fanny's a London girl. She'd never settle down here."

In the end it was decided that for awhile she should stay there.

On his way back to town he linked two quite dissimilar things, the quiet faith of his dying father and the mad violence of the audience at what was intended to have been a Pacifist meeting. He saw that there was more than a connection between the two, that the motives behind both expressions might easily have been the same.

The evening paper he purchased at St. Pancras had the report of a speech by Hervé, the great French Pacifist of pre-war days. To put it very mildly, he was no longer a Pacifist. Bateman had once heard Hervé speak in London and had talked with him after the meeting. That was three years back. It was a little disconcerting to find people like Hervé abandoning points of view.

. . . Bateman remembered that Hervé had been fiercely anti-militarist.

And later, when he was telling Fanny what had happened, he dwelt on the quiet fervor of his father's faith in the justice of the cause for which his brother had died. The quiet, clear certainty had impressed Bateman.

The last post brought him a letter from Mrs. Kennedy.

It was a very short letter indeed. Maurice had been wounded. His mother had no other information.

Bateman visualized wounds. He imagined Kennedy without an arm . . . blinded. . . .

"He may be dying, even now whilst we are talking," said Fanny fearfully.

Bateman attempted to write to Mrs. Kennedy. They were very old friends, but he found the writing of the letter very complicated. It was one of the great difficulties of the Pacifist in those warring times . . . letter writing.

CHAPTER SIX

MAURICE KENNEDY was not dying as Fanny had feared. He had "stopped" a bit of German shrapnel in that part of his anatomy most suited to such a proceeding and had received in so doing what is technically known as a "Blighty." It was exceedingly uncomfortable, and his sense of humor was much too strong to allow him to regard it as heroic. He had been in France five months when it happened, and was rather glad of the opportunity of leave.

Within forty-eight hours of the wound he was in bed in a great, gaunt, London hospital, his mind a confused mass of impressions of doctors, and nurses, and red crosses, and pain, and above all the white and amazingly clean hospital ship and train. He was a little dazed by the mechanical efficiency with which he had been transferred to the great silent ward in which he found himself. Rows of beds stretched away vaguely from him . . . and London existed as a muffled, pulsing suggestion of noise and energy beyond the open windows.

Here and there in the ward were neat exact nurses who moved silently. He was glad women were near him again.

One of these nurses, a pleasant-faced, mild-eyed woman of forty-five, brought him his tea, and later he sent post cards telling his friends where he was.

The following afternoon brought his mother to his bedside. She was, as ever, calm, but tiny spots of unaccustomed color spoke of the deeper, unexpressed feel-

ing in her. She verified in hurried anxious words that he was not seriously hurt.

She felt his legs . . . she had dreaded his losing a leg. . . .

"I shall be as right as rain in a week or so," he told her, with amusement. His father, it transpired, was coming that evening. He had been bound to go to the office (he had emerged long since from his retirement) and she would 'phone the good news to him . . . they had both, these old people, dreaded his losing a leg. . . .

Within a few minutes of her arrival Veronica Ward came with some beautiful yellow roses—always, as she knew, his favorite flowers.

Mrs. Kennedy, with an odd, undefinable feeling, saw that his face had flushed with pleasure at the girl's coming.

"It is good of you to come, Veronica," Kennedy said, when the greeting had been made.

"But why? I came as soon as I knew you were here. It's the least a friend could do. Besides, you might have been badly wounded. . . ."

"But I told you on the post card I was only slightly touched."

"Yes, I know, but one likes to *know*. . . ."

"I had the same feeling," Mrs. Kennedy said. "Until I had seen him, I wasn't certain." Suddenly the two women caught each other's eye and smiled.

They urged him to talk of his experiences and exactly what he was doing when he was hit. They asked him most of the absurd questions which were asked on such occasions. He had been hit when he was frizzling bacon, he told them.

Veronica stayed for half an hour and left, having promised to come again. She smiled down at him as they shook hands, and the memory of the smile stayed

with him. His mother's voice recalled him to the moment.

"She's a very nice girl, Maurice. I like her."

"I'm glad, Mater. I do, too." He spoke casually.

"By the way, Gwendoline—she may be here any minute—heard from Sophie Heatherly. You remember Sophie?"

"Oh, yes. . . ."

"She's to be married almost at once."

"Good. She was a jolly nice little girl. I'm glad."

"To a Canadian officer."

"Well done, Sophie!" he said.

Gwen brought more roses. She was dressed prosperously, wearing quite beautiful furs although the day was not at all cold.

"Poor old boy!" she said, stroking his hair. She, too, asked all the obvious questions.

"Reggy says that if there's anything you want, you're to let him know. He's most frightfully busy or he would have been here himself. He's supplying potatoes and fruit to the Navy. . . ."

"Good old Reggy . . . he would be doing something like that," Kennedy laughed as he spoke.

"I wish you were fonder of Reggy, Maurice," his sister said.

"He's a very decent chap," said her brother stoutly.

"And after all, if the potatoes are good ones. . . ."

"They are," said Gwen eagerly, without noticing the smile on her brother's face.

A little later the visiting hour was over and they had to go.

The evening post brought a note from Fanny Bateman saying how glad she was to hear that he was only slightly wounded. There was no word from Max, and

he was disappointed. Mr. Kennedy came too late to be admitted and arrived home acute with grievance.

"Here am I," he said to his wife, "working, working for the State to my uttermost, spending myself . . . when I could have stayed here in well-earned retirement; and because I'm an hour or so after their hours, they refuse to admit me to see my own son . . . it's damned red tape . . . *damned* red tape."

But she sympathized, fed him, and soothed him, and talked to him of Maurice, until she had him safe with his pipe and his paper.

The wound healed rapidly, and even after the first week the discomfort was very much less. A fortnight later Kennedy was sent to a hospital which was auxiliary to the great London one. It was a few miles out in Middlesex, and had originally been a country house. The window by his bed looked out over a park with wonderful old trees, and immediately below the soldiers and the nurses played tennis. With the exception of a few professional nurses the auxiliary hospital was run by V.A.D.'s, who were mainly girls from the middle-class families around.

Most of the soldiers had been working men in civil life, porters, grocers' boys, miners, and the like, but even at Handworth there were exceptions. One of the oddest juxtapositions brought about by the war was the promiscuous mixing of such girls and men. The soldiers were, in the main, a little awed by the V.A.D.'s; but the latter were splendid. Kennedy discovered during his stay at Handworth several cases of hopeless affection springing up in the Tommies' hearts for one or other of the V.A.D.'s . . . on the whole it hastened their recovery. It wasn't always quite one-sided of course.

Kennedy was in B Ward, and on the evening of his arrival he met with one of the greatest surprises of his

life. The day nurses went off duty at half past seven. The night staff in B Ward, which contained fifty-five beds, consisted of a sister and a V.A.D.

The night was drawing in and already dim lights were burning in the wards. Many of the men were even then asleep, for long days in the woods around were sleep inducing. Kennedy, however was wide awake, and from where he lay he could see the long ward with the beds, white and a little shadowy in the dim light.

There was a nurse—evidently one of the night nurses—at the far end of the ward, and Kennedy watched her go from bed to bed. There was little for her to do although here and there she stopped by a bedside for a few minutes.

It was darker in Kennedy's corner than in the rest of the ward, and when she came to his bed she peered down at him. She took up his chart from the wall by the bed and took it into the light. Her back was turned to him and he wondered what she was like. He had not seen her face clearly, although he knew that she wore glasses. Suddenly she turned and crossed to his bedside hurriedly.

"Maurice!" she said. He recognized her voice. It was Esther Pensimmon.

"Well, I'm . . ." he said, but his words lost themselves in his surprise.

"Just fancy . . ." she said.

"Isn't the world a tiny place!" he said inevitably.

"You're all right?" she asked. "The chart is good."

"Convalescent," he said briefly. "Wound healed splendidly."

"But it's too extraordinary," she insisted. "Meeting like this."

"I wrote to Max, but had no reply. I was disappointed he didn't come to see me!"

"You know he's in the Army?"

He sat up in surprise and as suddenly relapsed . . . he should not have sat up.

"Surprise on surprise . . . but you're not serious surely. Max! Why the last time I saw the old chap he was raving . . . cussing the old men."

"I hate old men . . ." said Esther Pensimmon irrelevantly. "In this country they almost monopolize power . . . and look what they've done with it."

"But tell me about Max. . . . It's incredible."

"Truth frequently is, Maurice," she said, with a smile.

"He's really in the Army?"

"Yes. The last time I saw him—two months ago—he was a Pacifist. I know that even more recently he has spoken at Pacifist meetings. Only this morning I heard from Fanny saying that he had enlisted. His brother was killed, you know."

"I didn't. That may have had something to do with it."

"I must be getting on. I'll come back later if you're not asleep, but you ought to be. Anyway, we'll talk in the morning. Now go to sleep." She tucked in his bedclothes, smoothed his pillow with deft touch, and went on.

For awhile Kennedy remained awake, thinking. There, half-way up the ward, was the quiet-moving Esther Pensimmon, soothing, calming, a source of infinite sympathy for the stricken men around her; and yet a short twelve months before she had been a bitter, disillusioned—or at any rate, she had imagined she was disillusioned—Feminist. But Kennedy remembered that she had liked the two men she had known, Bateman and himself. Her bitterness had been reserved for some vague and monstrous abstraction which she had called "men" which was unkind to, or suppressed, an equally

vague and much more monstrous abstraction to which she referred as "women." Kennedy pondered over the girls he had known, bright, spontaneous, gleaming, individual girls. It was obviously absurd and—yes, blasphemous—to put them in a ghastly lump and call them "women." If such a thing as "men" existed Esther Pensimmon found it here . . . all sorts and conditions of individual men all together, under one roof, surely made up "men." And there, not fifty yards away, was Esther Pensimmon in the midst of "men," with no bitterness, only the calming and eternal motherliness which lightens suffering and keeps sweetness and sanity in the world.

"D'yer know 'er, matey?" It was the man in the next bed who broke in on his thoughts, from his voice a rough, uncultured man, although it was now far too dark for Kennedy to see.

"Rather, quite well, before the War. It's strange to meet her here like this. I had no idea she was here . . . eh . . . matey."

"She's an angel," said the voice, with intense fervor. "A blooming angel. I've seed her with that poor devil over there. He was light 'eaded, and 'er touch quietened him. Some of 'em are a bit lardy-dar, but she's no blooming side at all. She ain't a beauty, but, by Gawd, she's got an 'art. My eyes 'ad to be bandaged and I couldn't read . . . not that I do much, yer know. She read to me one night for free 'ours. I didn't know much wot it was about, but it showed 'er 'eart."

"Yes, she's a good sort."

"I did 'ear as 'ow she'd been a Suffragette. Wot I say is, if the blinking Suffragette is like 'er, *give* 'em the vote and be damned. *We've* made a blurry mess with it, any'ow."

"She believes in votes for women, I know," admitted Kennedy.

"Anyways, she's a blurry good sort," the voice concluded, and silence came to the ward.

Kennedy's thoughts wandered to Bateman. There was something funny in the idea of Max as a soldier. He imagined him drilling . . . and attempting to argue with a sergeant. Obviously, he would never understand that there are people in the world with whom one doesn't argue, sergeants, lieutenants, and the more remote. But why hadn't he written to him?

He fell asleep, and when he awoke, although the ward was in broad daylight, few of his fellow-patients were stirring. He remained awake, looking out over the green trees and greener grass to the low hills on the far side of the Thames Valley. He was in this wholly delightful condition when one is half conscious of the world around, and wholly conscious of the exquisite warmth and comfort of one's bed . . . bed, unquestionably the greatest institution of Man for all his boasting. A man, a few yards away, stirred, turned over heavily, and was still again. Out in the trees the birds were singing when Esther Pensimmon came down the silent ward towards him.

"You're awake then?" she said quietly.

He smiled in answer.

"Slept well?"

"Like a brick. What a gorgeous morning!"

He saw that she was tired, that beneath her eyes were faint blue shadows. She smoothed his pillows.

"War!" she said, with a startling touch of bitterness. "Look at them, boys, most of them, as gentle as . . ." the comparison failed her. "Maimed, many of them, and they're full of the quaintest humanity, and they've

got strange little gifts. But I mustn't talk like this. It's . . . it's frightfully unprofessional." She smiled as she spoke, and he remembered of old how her face lighted up when she smiled, as if a heaviness had left it.

"You don't strike me as being a tiny bit professional, Esther," he said. "Thank God!" he added. "It's much better to be womanly than professional, from our point of view, I mean," he added.

He imagined she would dislike his words, in the old days she certainly would have done. As it was she smiled again, a tired smile, but as before it animated her face.

"That's the tragic part of the whole beastly business. The awful waste of it all. They've all got mothers . . . the dead ones, the ones buried in the big, wholesale graves have mothers, poor women who let them go . . . in the main neither the boys who went, or their mothers, had a voice in making this war. If only we—the women—had had a voice, either here or in Germany, the blood-lust of the old men would not have prevailed."

"The German women have been very foul towards our prisoners out there," Kennedy said. "One hears horrid stories."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe that any woman, any mother or any woman who had ever been, or might ever be a mother, could be foul to them. The German women are women first and German after, just as women are the world over. Patriotism is an invention of the male; so is war, throughout history women have hated war; always women have paid for war."

"Some of us have paid a bit on account, Esther. Not me, particularly. . . . I've got off jolly lightly, but the boys who didn't get off so lightly. They have paid, you know."

"And each of them has left a woman who has paid and who will go on paying. Mother, wife . . . some woman who had never met him, perhaps, some girl who would have met him, and married him, and been the mother of his children, and who will now go on through life hugging thoughts of what might have been . . . life was full enough already of such women, God knows!"

It was impossible not to appreciate the deep, the intense meaning of her words, and Kennedy was silent awhile.

"You're a Pacifist, you're worse than Bateman ever was," he said at length, with mock seriousness.

"Of course, nineteen women out of twenty are. I'm certain it is the case in Germany. German women simply have no means of expressing their point of view, they never have had. Look at the people who govern Germany—the soldiers, old men, Von Hessler—eighty-seven—Von this and Von that. Look at their faces, square, without an ideal and without ideas, save one. Imagine the colossal machine they have built up in their army . . . the goose step, and saluting and such nonsense. I tell you, Maurice, women could never have done it. They're too near reality, they have deep down in them too keen a sense of the absurd to do such monstrous things. Besides . . . they create life, and those who create, whether they are women or artists, do not destroy. To destroy life wantonly and to destroy the Cloth Hall at Ypres—did you ever see it?—is possible in the same mind. But no artist could have done it, or no woman."

"You distinguish between the Woman and the Artist . . . that is interesting. . . ."

"Woman as a Woman is distinct from the Artist, but both have the knowledge of the sanctity of creation . . . and neither are wantons."

A patient a little way off awoke and coughed painfully. Esther Pensimmon crossed to his bed. Afterwards, she had far too much work to do to talk to Kennedy.

His convalescence was rapid and within a few days he was able to leave his bed. A week later he was allowed into the grounds.

The second Sunday he was in Handworth his father and Reggy came down. The elder man talked of the importance of the war work he was doing, of the series of revolutions in the office—it was controlled now, to Mr. Kennedy's intense annoyance, by a gentleman to whom he referred scathingly as a booking clerk, although his description is inaccurate and probably libellous—he had, it appeared, no faith in business men. They had no traditions. They were all push and go . . . froth . . . nothing solid. And all this in front of Reggy, who smiled indulgently since it was his father-in-law speaking.

Reggy was very cheerful, talked technically of the trenches and admitted that he was "making a bit." As Gwen said, "Somebody must stay at home to run the country," and Reggy was running his little bit of it with eminent satisfaction. His function in the scheme of things was to purchase potatoes from the grower at so much a pound or hundredweight, add an appreciable amount to the cost, and sell it to the various Government Departments. This quaint proceeding rendered him "indispensable" and owing to his deftness with figures, and the great pressure under which the Excess Profit officials were working, he was, as he cheerfully admitted, making a bit. He told Kennedy several little anecdotes about diddling—his own expressive phrase—the Excess Profit people. A mythical secretary was one of his wheezes—Reggy again—and quite delightful travelling

expenses. Kennedy watched him quietly the while he spoke; his trousers were creased mathematically, his tie was just a little too carefully chosen, he was just a little too well dressed. He was much more gentlemanly than any gentleman ever is. Kennedy watched him, but said nothing; he couldn't without being violent. The grim and ghastly injustice of it all. There were men he knew—dear men—across there in France, dirty and fearless and great, giving their all cheerfully for England and a shilling a day, giving themselves week after week without hope of reward and, in the main, without complaint. And here, in maddeningly creased trousers, was Reggy, indispensable, "making a bit"; diddling, full of wheezes, complacent, pleased with himself, and his wife, and everything that was his; Reggy, who, thought Kennedy, was "jolly wonderful"; Reggy, blatantly patriotic. . . .

No, it was no use saying anything. He looked round the ward and saw the rows of beds, the men in them; he saw the quiet-faced nurses moving about . . . these, these were England, not the Reggies . . . the scum. He was calmer as he thought. There is always scum in a great upheaval. Afterwards he gave Reggy's cigarettes to the man at his side.

After they had gone, in the quiet of the evening, he thought things over. With the amazing toleration of the soldier he strove to be fair, even to Reggy. But he ceased to think of him almost at once, and his thoughts went back to the men he had left in France, the crude, natural men he had lived with these many weeks, the men whose deaths he had watched . . . the men he had grown to understand. Their memory cleansed from his brain the residue of the irritation Reggy had caused.

And, as he was thinking, Esther Pensimmon entered the ward. He thought of her bitter tongue, and the mild calming eyes behind her glasses. The agony, out of

which Reggy was making his bit, had touched some chord deep down in her, a responsive chord. The wells of affection, which convention had done its best to choke in the days of peace, were unsealed, and the thwarted maternal instincts of the woman had at length their sway. There was no doubt in any one who watched her with imagination. She mothered the poor broken boys. Her touch calmed them as that of their mothers would have done, and for the same reason. Or as the man next to Kennedy had observed, "She'd got an 'art.'"

Lord Verulam uttered the same truth many centuries before. If you drive Nature out of the door, he said, she will come in at the window. But Lord Verulam was Francis Bacon, who had the knack of such sayings.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ON the whole Kennedy had an exceedingly good time at Handworth. He was able to do a fair amount of work during his convalescence, which Esther Pensimon read during the long nights of duty. As of old, she criticized his work ably. She herself, he discovered, had done no writing for months. The more he thought of the revolution which the war had wrought in her, the more he understood it . . . and the more he understood it, the more he saw that it wasn't a revolution at all, that Esther was essentially the same.

Veronica came down frequently and spent delightful hours with him in the Dutch garden or the woods around. She was fervently patriotic and her viewpoint was very different from Esther's. She hated Germany and all things German with a simple, inclusive hatred which amused Kennedy very much, although he did not share it. A certain flippancy which had been at times charming, and at times intensely irritating, in the old days, was not in evidence very often, although at times it bubbled up. Sometimes books came from her paper for Kennedy to review. Excepting for this new seriousness, or rather this lack of flippancy in her, he could distinguish no great change in her from the Veronica of whom he had despaired in the old days. There *were* differences, however. . . .

His reputation as a writer—such as it was—stood him in good stead, and the V.A.D.'s looked out for his stories in the magazines; at night, at the dinner tables of their middle class homes, they spoke of the writer whom they

had at the hospital. For a while he was quite a little hero, and was invited to the homes of the amateur nurses for tea and tennis, and so forth.

It was a pleasant time, which went all too rapidly. He could get leave most days until six o'clock, and occasionally lunched in town with Veronica. So pleasant indeed was the time that it was with very mixed feelings indeed that he reported at his Depot. He was put on light duty for awhile, and still found considerable time for his own work. There were not the same facilities for such work as there had been at Handworth, but most afternoons he found the canteen sufficiently deserted for his purpose. He struck up a friendship with another man recently discharged from hospital whose name was Spikings. The absurd name had attracted Kennedy in the first place.

Spikings found him writing one day in the canteen. "Allo!" he said. "Sending a chit to yer girl?"

"No," said Kennedy seriously. "I'm writing . . . a story, you know."

"For a paper?"

"A magazine . . ." Kennedy said.

"What about?"

"Oh, . . . things you know, men and women, love and so on."

"Let's read it?"

"If you want to."

For awhile no sound was heard in the canteen as Spikings laboriously waded through Kennedy's not too legible manuscript. He made an end and handed it back to the writer.

"They pays yer for that?"

"Yes . . . I hope so. My wife and children would starve otherwise."

Spikings' answer was monosyllabic.

"Without kid," he went on. "Do you mean to say they pays yer for this chunk?"

"They do!" said Kennedy evenly.

"Gawdstruth!" said Spikings, and then as if to show that after all he understood, he added:—

"Mugs, blurry mugs!"

As literary criticism there is something to be said for Spikings' viewpoint, as Kennedy knew, but by this time Kennedy was far too old a writer to be annoyed by criticism, and he went on writing imperturbably, the while Spikings sucked a meditative pipe and commented at intervals on "men and women and love and so on." Spikings as a commentator on Life was much more joyous than Spikings as a literary critic.

About a month after Kennedy's discharge from hospital, he was transferred to a Cadet Battalion, and the next time he met Veronica he was in the qualified glory of a Cadet's uniform. He looked, she assured him, "ripping." They spent considerable time in front of the windows of Army outfitters, planning details of his future kit.

But if the Cadet's uniform added dignity to the soldier, Veronica had news which added to her own. She was no longer *on* a paper. She was a full-blown editor of a paper. Her chief had joined the Army, and she was carrying on for him. She had transferred the cushion from her own chair to that of the editor's, and had then filled the chair with satisfaction to the directors; the current number was hers. . . .

"And so you're an editor!" he said. "Well, well, fancy little Veronica."

"Don't be an ass, Maurice."

"I shall forthwith instruct Mr. Smithers—the great Smithers—to send you short stories of my own manufacture."

"Napoo, old top!" she said. "We get our goods from a syndicate."

"You would," he said. "It's a pernicious practice. Change it, Veronica. You can't get *tone* in a paper with such methods . . . I say, don't you like those breeches?"

"Positively nutty, aren't they?" Veronica replied. "I like that faint suggestion of mustard color . . . in . . . in breeches."

"It's jolly funny, Veronica, that we should be discussing such intimate article of attire as breeches, don't you think?"

"Honi soit," she said, with a laugh. "Besides, this is kit. Every one is legitimately interested in kit. I was discussing vermin proof underwear with dear old Jevons—my late editor, you know—and he's the most completely happily married man I know. Vermin-proof underwear! Why, eighteen months ago I should have shuddered at the mere suggestion. Now it seems perfectly natural."

"What! Vermin-proof underwear! Veronica!"

"You silly old fool!" she laughed.

That evening she insisted on paying the bill at dinner.

"I want to," she insisted. "I'm an editor now, and I'm getting an editor's salary, because of the war. You're getting a shilling a day because of the same war. Things are different."

"But that's rot, Veronica. Now along I'm writing almost as much as ever I did. Besides, there is my 'private income.'" This same private income was one of their standard jokes.

In the end, as she really wanted to pay the bill, she did so. It is strange what woman can do if she *really* wants to. Usually if a woman gives way, it is because she doesn't particularly mind one way or the other, and

then a clever woman does it as if she were making a very considerable sacrifice.

The time came at last when Kennedy was able to discard the white band round the hat and to don a Sam Brown belt, which he had previously cleaned many times in order to remove the newness. He met Veronica without previously informing her that he had been gazetted. She gazed at him with frank admiration as he came up.

"Maurice!" she said. "You look ripping . . . *ripping*. What a dinky little pip. You bad child not to tell me!"

"I only knew yesterday," he said, with a smile. "It's been rather a rush to get it all up. I thought it would rather buck you!"

"You old swanker . . . but really, I'm delighted . . . *delighted*, Maurice. You've got such a chest."

"I *am* rather a fine man, you know," he said, with a grin. "Frankly, I know you think I'm a most awful fool, but I've never been so absolutely" (he pronounced every syllable) "bucked in my life. Uniform is becoming, Veronica, isn't it?"

"Rather the *uniform's* all right." She beamed on him delightedly, which took the wickedness out of her words, and having slipped her hand in his arm, the three of them, Veronica Ward, Maurice Kennedy, and Samuel Brown, set off together.

A guardsman, an enormous guardsman, saluted him, and the subaltern decorously returned the salute.

"I *say*, Maurice . . ." said Veronica.

The dinner was the dinner of their lives.

All things end, even choosing kit, although, if the shopkeepers had their way, there would be no end to the kit chosen. All sorts of things are essential if one

believes them. One of them tried to sell Kennedy a bath which could also (with ingenious modifications) be used as a table.

"Or a coffin?" asked Kennedy.

"We find it in general demand, sir," the shopkeeper replied, but it was not purchased.

He found his mess-mates typical British officers, who made him at home at once, as far as the traditional reserve of their race would allow them. As proof thereof he won eight and sixpence at auction the first night he was with them.

It was easy to get to town from the place where he was stationed, but the work was heavy, so heavy indeed that he had no time for his private work. Getting leave had been reduced, he found, to a fine art, and many were the stories of successful and unsuccessful attempts.

One ingenious youth was reminded by the O.C. that he had already lost two grandmothers during his course, and that it reflected on the accuracy of the statement that yet another had passed away.

"But one of them was my step-mother's mother," the subaltern explained, and although not successful, it was regarded by the Mess as an excellent recovery.

They learnt the O.C.'s side of the story through one of the majors.

"I told the young devil that he had already killed two grandmothers," the O.C. said, with a grin. "It was entirely a guess of mine, but he daren't contradict it."

On the whole Kennedy spent three very happy months. His leave was divided between Veronica and his people at Shere.

And then, very hurriedly, he was sent to France with a draft. He had just time to wire to his mother and to Veronica. As fate willed, the wire to Mrs. Kennedy was not delivered at the little out-of-the-way home at

Shere until the postman went there the following morning, by which time Kennedy was on his way to the coast. The one to Veronica reached her in time, and at seven thirty in the morning she met Kennedy at Victoria. The station was alive with men returning to France, and with the womenfolk who had come to see them off. Kennedy had been there some time wandering up and down. He knew quite well that both his wires might have been late, and cursed the luck which had made such a rush necessary. A woman near him sobbed as she clutched a soldier's arm. He felt suddenly very isolated, acutely alone.

Veronica came up behind him suddenly.

"Hallo!" she said. "It's been quite a rush to get here."

"I say, old girl, this is splendid of you. I hardly hoped . . . I wired to the Mater as well, but that was almost certain not to be in time. I *am* glad. I was getting morbid."

"You poor old thing. We've got thirty-five minutes. I was afraid you might not be here yet, but I risked it. I wonder if you would take me into the refreshment room and get me some tea?"

"Sure."

A tired waitress served them listlessly.

"You'll be on leave in three months, you know," Veronica said cheerfully. "We'll have a right royal time."

She sipped her tea.

"You *are* a good kid to turn up at this unearthly hour," he said again.

"But I wanted to," she protested. "I should hate you to have gone away alone."

"When was the last time I tried to make love to you, Veronica?" he asked thoughtfully. "I haven't for an awful time!" he added.

"Well, not to excess, anyway," she said, with a laugh. "We've had some ripping times though, Maurice."

"You've been splendid . . ." he said enthusiastically.

She was delighted for she grasped his meaning, but when she spoke there was a touch of wistfulness in her voice. "There's not much a woman can do," she said. "If one soldier thinks that she has been splendid, she hasn't altogether failed."

"Do you know, Veronica," he said, "in spite of your exalted position and the transference of that cushion from your old chair to its present elevated home, I believe you are just a tiny bit sentimental this morning. And so early in the morning!"

"Don't tease!" she said. "And don't be mean about my exalted position. I've only got it because men like you have left such positions for others which are still more beyond my power to fill. I feel most atrociously insignificant this morning; don't worry, it's good for me!"

They walked up and down the station and many of the soldiers glanced at Veronica as they passed. Her face was a little flushed and her hair, which had been very hurriedly done that morning, had yielded certain hostages to the hurry in the form of stray wisps which came from beneath the little blue hat she was wearing. She was one of those extremely lucky girls who seem to gain by a slight untidiness.

"You look ripping this morning, Veronica," he said. "You're miles ahead of any other girl here. . . ."

She slipped her hand in his arm by way of reply.

"It's funny, Veronica, but I don't think, in spite of the years I've known you, that you've a single thing I've given you."

"There are memories," she said quietly. "Days together on the river . . . a host of things."

"Yes, but I mean something you can look at . . . something you can hold. I know it's sentimental, but I want you to have this."

He produced a ring from his pocket, an old-fashioned ring with one large opal in it, a stone of vivid translucent blues and greens. "I've had it for years and I should love to think that you had it. Will you?"

"If you want me to, Maurice. It's a very beautiful ring!"

"I do want you to. . . ."

He gave it to her and she took off her glove and slipped it on one of her fingers, a finger of no significance, and for awhile they walked in silence.

"I shall miss you horribly," she said, as the time drew near. "You'll write regularly, won't you?"

"Of course, if it's at all possible. If not, those jolly little field cards will have to do."

The talk was disjointed towards the end.

"Well, good-by, Veronica," he said, at the last. "It's done me an enormous amount of good, your coming . . . it makes things seem more worth while. I was very down when you came, dear."

"Good-by, old boy. . . . I shall look for your letters."

The whistle went and doors were being closed noisily. "Good-by," she went on, and suddenly as the train started, she kissed him full on the lips. He saw her standing there, a unit amid a confused crowd of waving women, saw her until the train had rolled heavily out of the station.

And even when the Thames was crossed and the drabness of South London was around him, he could still feel her kiss on his mouth, intense, tingling. . . .

CHAPTER EIGHT

FOR the first few days in France Kennedy felt very lonely indeed. Inevitably his thoughts centered on Veronica and for awhile she typified England in his thoughts. One hears a great deal of Patriotism in these modern days, but Patriotism, admittedly one of the great factors in human thought and action, is, when all has been said, an abstraction. Not for nothing is the emblem of a nation, the rallying point of patriotism, always a woman. Dear, glorious France and solemn, puzzled old England have this in common; and in the heart of the soldier Patriotism is, almost as invariably, a woman, one woman. Blighty to most of the boys over there was a confused mass of memories—the moving life of London, the quiet village—which clarified into one face, the face of a girl. With Kennedy England and Veronica in those first days were almost interchangeable terms. England had been Veronica.

In his unaccustomed bed he lay awake thinking of her, twisting phrases she had used, expressions he had caught on her face, into wild meanings. Judged superficially, these last weeks, he thought at least that she had been fonder of him than in the old days. But he knew that a girl of her type would do her very best to give him a good time, to make his last days in England happy ones, to give him memories to clutch at in the days ahead when she could no more help him. Had that been all? Had she been just an English girl deeply touched by her debt to him, and thereby acting a part? He proved to himself time after time that she had not been acting, that at last she was responding a little to

the wild love in him; and even as he proved it doubts would come flooding back into his mind. She was just the decent sort of girl who would send him away happy, who would never forgive herself if she let him go back to France miserable because of her.

There was the kiss, of course. He visualized it for the hundredth time as far as a man may. He saw her face upturned to his and felt her lips warm on his . . . a sudden little passionate surrender of herself. But—always the “but” crept in—she might merely have been sorry for him going away from everything like that. She might—and so he would twist things until the cynic Sleep touched his lips with a passionless kiss.

It was ten days before her first letter came. It was as one might have expected, a cheerful womanly letter, with a dozen little intimacies which made it dear to him, intimacies which had he not loved her would have passed almost unnoticed as he read. He put it carefully away in the pocket of his tunic, and with the weeks that first letter increased into a bundle.

One day he picked up a magazine in the mess and glanced through it to see if it contained any of his own work. It did not, but his eyes caught a title, “The Letters,” and he read the story. It was of a subaltern who carried just such a bundle of letters as reposed in his own pocket. The unhappy young man was killed, and the letters were stained with his life blood in the approved style. The man who found the letters, hesitated whether to send them to the girl in England who had written them. In the end he did not. It was a type of story which was quite common and Kennedy smiled as he read it. He took out the bundle and looked at it, holding it in his hand hesitatingly. He put them back again after awhile.

How many letters he wrote to Veronica he never knew,

but the mere writing of them kept a flame alight in him. They seemed to him a touch of reality in a grotesquely unreal world. He put all his thoughts into them, thoughts which he dare not utter, for there were none to understand. Hardly ever did he speak of the war. He was "busy" or was having a "slack time." Ideas which came to him for stories were occasionally put into his letters to her; odd people he met, including a gorgeous batman, named 'Orris, who was "improving himself" by a course of reading of the Classics. At different times he found him with Marcus Aurelius, Heine's "Art and Letters" ('Orris referred to him as "'Een") and (frequently) with a tattered volume of Boswell. His conversation contained snatches of the old Doctor's wisdom done into the purest Cockney; and Kennedy found in them a very necessary comic relief to the tragedy which was working to its inevitable and ponderous end around him. In addition to his loyalty to Boswell, the batman read anything which came to his hand and found delight in Kennedy's books. The latter tried poetry on the batman with disastrous results. He lent him a volume of dear, God-forsaken old Omar, "'E could moppit up, couldn't 'e?" said 'Orris, on returning the volume. This and a hundred similar things Kennedy told Veronica.

Some two months after he had returned to France, and when England had become very remote, his battalion went out of the line to rest. They were some ten miles behind the lines, and from the billets it was possible to get into a tiny French town a few miles farther back still. One afternoon Kennedy walked into the town to make certain small purchases, which done, he wandered round. It was a typical French town and he found it quite interesting in spite of the English atmosphere which necessarily prevailed.

He was lighting a cigarette outside an estaminet, when he turned to return a salute of a passing soldier, and found himself looking at Bateman.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "Max!"

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Max gravely. "But it is I."

"I *am* pleased," said Kennedy, and seizing his friend's hand he shook it heartily. "How are you, old boy?"

"So, so," said Bateman. "Physically so-so . . . and mentally calmer, I think. One doesn't think so easily out here, one hardly thinks at all."

"I knew you were in the Army, Max," said Kennedy. "Esther Pensimmon nursed me at Handworth. I little thought the time would come when you and I would meet as soldiers. Remember the old days and the poetry?"

"Ay!" said Bateman, reminiscently. "I wonder who will write the really great poem about the war?"

"God knows!" said Kennedy.

"But . . ." Kennedy's words died away, but his face told Bateman what his question would have been.

"Why did I join the Army after all?"

"Yes . . . Esther didn't know. The last time we met you were not enthusiastically patriotic."

"I don't think I know . . . really. It wasn't any definite action of the Hun, although God knows there are enough of them. My brother being killed upset me . . . and then your getting wounded; there was that poor devil of a brother-in-law of mine . . . ultimately I suppose I saw that the Pacifist position was untenable, for, very reluctantly, I did see it. Hang it all, their very Socialists are just as bad. It's a case of a whole race bitten with madness. Even now there is much that I loathe mixed up with our case, there's always the sinister trail of the capitalist, and in England there are whole

sections of people who are making fortunes out of this agony of war. . . . But there, one does not expect patriotism in such canaille. Even now I'm not bitter about the German people, they've been misled by their old men, and they've got to be led back to reason by some means or other. I saw that a German victory would be the end of all things. People like me would be shot within a week under a German régime. There were a dozen contributing reasons, and in the end I came in."

"I knew you would," said Kennedy.

"Yes, but I'm no damned use now I'm in," Bateman said.

"What do you mean?" Kennedy asked, in surprise.

Bateman shrugged his shoulders. "I'm an orderly in the Casualty Clearing Station here," he said. "I crocked up as soon as I was in the trenches . . . my chest."

"Rotten luck for you. Still, there's got to be Casualty Clearing Stations and orderlies in them. Frankly, Max, the work is better suited to you than work in the line. You're not a man of war, you know."

"I don't know," Bateman replied. "It's a rum world, Maurice. I'm doing all sorts of odd, unpleasant jobs and most of the time I'm just, as we say, mucking about. One day is the same as another. One loses the sensation of time almost."

"Why don't you put in for a commission?" Kennedy asked.

"I'm not fit to lead men," Bateman replied. "I should hate attempting to do so."

"I'm in rest billets for some days yet," Kennedy said.

"I've got a room practically to myself," said Bateman. "Quite a lot of books, too."

"You would have," laughed Kennedy. "I'll look you up. That'll be the simplest, I think."

Bateman gave him the address and he promised to look in one afternoon. The soldier saluted gravely and the two went their ways. Each thought how little the other had changed essentially.

A few days later Kennedy called as he had promised. He found Bateman with little difficulty, and he followed the soldier into his room. Bateman's quarters were comparatively comfortable, and, as he had said, he had a small heap of books. They were in a corner and were characteristically untidy.

"This job has compensations," said the visitor, with a laugh as he looked around.

"Nearly everything has," said Bateman. "I've got one of those little coffee machines—it's the chief compensation—and I've got some good coffee. Shall I make you some?"

"Rather. It wouldn't really seem like looking up Max Bateman if you didn't make coffee. As a matter of fact, I always preferred the coffee when Fanny made it, although it was more than my place was worth to tell you so in England. Your coffee was the one thing over which you were absolutely conceited, and no one ever touches a friend's conceit. That is the one law of friendship."

"You're just as priceless an old fool," laughed Bateman. "You ought to get tons of copy out here, don't you think?"

"I haven't," said Kennedy.

"No, I suppose not . . . *you* wouldn't. It doesn't fit in with little love stories with a Cornish setting, what?" Bateman's smile took the sting out of his words.

"You were never fair to my work, Max," Kennedy said.

"Your work was never fair to you," Bateman said. "If you can write at all, you'll find material out here

all right, though don't make a saccharine solution of it, like most of them do."

He busied himself with the precious coffee machine and the resultant coffee was pronounced good.

Afterwards for awhile they talked, and towards the end of Kennedy's stay Bateman produced the same slender volume of Yeats from which he had read so often in England. It was a little more disreputable and very much dirtier. . . .

"It seems years since I last read to you from this," said Bateman.

"It's a deuce of a time," Kennedy agreed. "But go ahead now, anyway."

"What shall I read?"

"What you will!"

Bateman smiled and for awhile turned over the pages of the volume in his hand. He stopped at "Innisfree."

"You'll remember this," he said, and once again Kennedy listened to his deep sonorous voice as he read, "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree. . . ."

At the end of the poem he repeated one of the lines,

"And evening full of the linnets' wings."

"That's a wonderful line," he said, and in silence which followed the dull ceaseless noise of guns was heard. He read most of the poems he used to read from the slender volume. "The cloths of Heaven":

"The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of light and night and the half light."

and the others including, as he always did include, "When you are old," surely the greatest modern poem.

At the end he closed the little, grimy book tenderly.

"If only we were governed by dreamers like the man who wrote these, we should never have got into such

a beastly mess, as the 'business' men and the strong, silent men who never stop talking have got us into. But there, your dreamer has too keen a sense of the ridiculous ever to attempt to govern other people."

"My dear Max, the idea of picking out dreamers to govern a race!"

"Why not?"

"Well, much as I love poetry, particularly when I have you to interpret it for me, I cannot conceive a poet, as a good statesman."

"A poet is a man," said Bateman, "who creates beauty, a man of imagination, of vision. That is what we want in life . . . beauty, imagination, vision, and when I suggest that we should put the only men capable of giving us beauty into power, you laugh. And yet without laughter, with no sense of the comic, the wildly comic side of it, you quietly give power to a pack of mediocrities, lawyers, successful tradesmen, aristocrats who are the grandsons of pork butchers, brewers and the like, and you expect these . . . these . . . canaille, to make the world more beautiful. The poet and dreamer would make mistakes, but life would be vastly interesting; as it is, it is like old men with power, dull and dangerous."

"Why limit it to poets? Why not painters? I can imagine a Cabinet of Post Impressionists and Cubists under the Premiership of Mr. Nevinson making life, as you say, vastly interesting, *vastly*," he added.

"Anyway, I had rather have a painter in power than a pork butcher. Each—as the wonderful race around us would say—according to his "gout"—I would rather have an artist like Nevinson as Premier than any lawyer who ever was since Ananias."

"You seem very down on lawyers whom you infer are liars. But surely liars are men of imagination? The

man who never told a lie must have been *intensely* commonplace, as well as American."

"Imagination has many aspects. I use it of that spiritual perception which is found in the poet, and which is distinct from the imaginings of a liar or a lawyer." Bateman had replied seriously, but he noticed that Kennedy was smiling and smiled too. The mutual smile in the old days, as now, heralded the end of an argument, a tacit admission that they had led themselves into a mental *cul-de-sac*, the which ended many of their verbal sparrings.

A little later Kennedy left. He took with him the feeling of mental exhilaration, of acuteness, with which those evenings with Bateman in the old days had invariably left him. There was a buoyancy, a suggestion, a sympathy about Bateman, tritely summed up in the word personality, to which Kennedy was attuned and responsive.

Walking back to his mess Kennedy pondered over the strangeness of a friendship which could be dropped for eighteen months and then quietly picked up again. He and Bateman had gathered the broken strings together without an effort, and had achieved at once the old delightful intimacy.

Some one was playing revue music on the Mess gramophone when Kennedy arrived. It was particularly bad, even for revue music, and the influence of the hour during which Bateman had read some of the most beautiful verse in our tongue to him, had not quite worn off. He lit his pipe, however, and sat down grimly.

"That's good, Kennedy, what?" a fellow subaltern asked. "I saw the show in town when I was on leave. You ought to."

"Yes, I must," agreed Kennedy, who had had quite enough argument for one day.

CHAPTER NINE

THE little room which Bateman had made his own was peculiarly attractive to Kennedy. It was the one place he had discovered in France in which he had found those links with habit and the past which may be summed up in the poetic phrase "feeling at home." Bateman's quiet voice and the genius of the men whose work he interpreted, reminded Kennedy that beyond all the hellish turmoil of war were spacious days of freedom and sanity.

He would have visited Max again in a day or so, but the "rest" was shortened so suddenly that Kennedy found himself back in the trenches without having seen Bateman again.

Fortunately, there was Veronica to whom he could write, for in France there were weary moments when Doubt talked to one in the din which should have been the quiet hours of a coming day, when one's soul was not quite so steadfast, when one questioned the things which alone made the sacrifice of youth bearable.

The presence of Bateman in the Army had steadied Kennedy's faith in the causes for which he had already given three years of his youth, and for which, any hour, he might give his life. Men who came back from leave talked of the old men in the restaurants, and in smart civilian suits, who walked in the way of youth . . . it was talk which sprang from the pessimism which usually follows a good time, he knew, and it would pass, but sometimes he visualized the old gentlemen. War, he re-

membered Bateman had once said, is the triumph of age. Old men, as they clutched tightly at power, had, throughout the ages, inculcated what they called the *Wisdom* of the Old . . . the Bible reeked of it. Was it, after all, just a low form of protective cunning . . . ?

The memories of these conversations in the blaring dawn were sometimes disturbing, and it was a quietening thought to know that after all Bateman had joined the Army, was indeed only a few miles away.

It was fairly quiet in that part of the front just then, and consequently intensely monotonous. So much so that when at last the Battalion went back to the Rest Billees, Kennedy was absurdly glad.

He looked Bateman up as soon as he was able and remained in the little room a couple of hours, what time his host again made coffee and read to him. One of the sisters had given Bateman a copy of Rupert Brooke's poems; she had "discovered" the poet, in common with the rest of his countrymen, after his death in the Mediterranean, and was surprised to find that Bateman actually had known the poetry for a considerable time.

He read several of the poems to Kennedy . . . he himself preferred "Grantchester" to any of the later ones.

"Just think!" he said, when he came to the end. "The sheer pitiful waste . . . why, Rupert Brooke was worth more than the Dardanelles and the whole Turkish Empire! He was a *Poet!*"

"He certainly was a poet," Kennedy agreed. "I think you are wrong though, in spite of it, because if ever man died willingly for his country that man was our poet."

"I agree, but the pitiful waste is there none the less. He should never have been allowed to risk his life. Artists should be prohibited from enlistment."

"Like the old gentlemen?" Kennedy asked with a smile.

"Yes, but for the opposite reason."

"I don't follow," said Kennedy.

"The Artist is too valuable even for war. The old men aren't *any* damned use, even for cannon fodder. They cumber the earth like slugs. . . ."

"You are an ass," Kennedy laughed. "Age isn't a virtue, I know, but at the worst it's a misfortune. Many of the old men would come if they had the opportunity."

"They had it in National Service," Bateman replied. "A ghastly failure, and the only appeal made to old men for anything. . . ."

"You see blood, my lad, when you talk of the old men. You're getting on yourself. Age will come."

"I hope not," said Bateman. "I should much rather die young, in full possession of my faculties, than gradually decay whilst I clutched at power with weakening grasp. In any case, if I were old I should not attempt to impose my will on the young to whom the world always belongs, even if I could do so by using the cunning which the aged develop."

"A little rat poison will meet your needs then . . ."
Kennedy laughed.

"No, never fear. I shan't be old," said Bateman.

"You talk about old men, Max. What about old ladies?"

"I like old ladies," said Bateman, still seriously. "They didn't want the war . . . they're appalled by it. Look into their eyes when they say good-by to a son or grandson. The old ladies know who caused the war, particularly the old ladies in Germany . . . they have no illusions . . . they have found out the old men, long before this."

"You're incorrigible, Bateman! You really are!"

Followed the mutual smile, and soon after it was necessary for Kennedy to go, as an orderly is not always his own master. Bateman came with him to a side door of the grounds of what had once been a convent. It was a door in a wall, and outside he paused. The convent had been built on a tiny hill overlooking the little town, which in the sunlight was a fairy town of white and brown. The quiet peace of the evening was dissipated by the rumble of guns which went on always. Beyond the town clustering beneath them was a river, a river now of tragedy and glory, a river in the dim valley of which the fate of Civilization would be decided. Beyond the little wood the setting sun had touched the river to molten glory and Bateman spoke the lines which flashed into his mind:

"The ancient river, smiling as he goes,
New mailed in armour, to the ancient sea."

"It is beautiful," said Kennedy, a little wistfully.

And the relentless swell of the guns filled the interval which followed his words with hellish irony. The destruction of silence, and the deep meaning of silence, is among the bitterest fruits of war's ghastly harvest.

"Good-by!" said Bateman suddenly, and turned away. Some impulse made Kennedy look after his retreating figure. Bateman . . . the poet, the revolutionary, the man who more than any other had colored Kennedy's life, was utterly out of place in a machine, and none knew it as did Kennedy. "Poor old Max!" he muttered. The retreating figure was hidden by a clump of rhododendra and the man who watched him turned away.

That night Bateman was killed.

The German airmen, either accidentally or deliber-

ately, dropped bombs on the Casualty Clearing Station from (so observers said) less than a couple of hundred feet, at which altitude to any man with normal sight the international markings must have been perfectly clear. No words can add to that night's foulness. Two bombs fell on the hospital itself and seven, harmlessly, in the grounds. One killed seven wounded soldiers and a nurse, the second fell on the far side of the building and did very little damage excepting for wrecking Bateman's room and the one above it. The following morning his body was recovered, crushed so that death must have kissed his lips, and he not known the caress. . . .

When Kennedy saw him, it was late afternoon. The M.O. was with him.

"He was a queer chap," the M.O. was saying, "an intellectual. . . ."

"Yes. I knew him intimately," Kennedy said. "He was my friend."

The M.O. was silent.

Kennedy turned down the blanket which covered the body and looked down at the face he knew so well. For all the poor broken body the face was little hurt. An orderly had wiped the white face, but the black hair was thick with blood. The eyes were closed.

For many seconds Kennedy stood looking down at the immobile serenity that was death. The face was not so much peaceful as unemotional; there was no evidence in death of that spirituality which had been the essence of Bateman in life. Something had left him.

"Damn them!" said the M.O., who found the silence a little unnerving.

"My God, what a waste!" said Kennedy. "Oh, my God, what a waste!" And then was silent again.

The M.O. took the cloth from Kennedy's inert hand and covered the poor face up again. "Come on out of

it," he said gruffly. "No use dwelling on it. Morbid. It's all waste . . . all."

The two men went out and the M.O. went about his duties.

Kennedy turned along the wall to the gate.

Almost exactly twenty-four hours before he had stood there with Bateman. Nothing had changed. The houses clustered brownly at his feet and the valley went round invisibly under the hill. The sun still touched the water of the river into radiance, and everywhere might have been peace save for the hellish monotone of guns away on the horizon. Bateman dead or alive. What did it matter!

The glinting glory of the water caught Kennedy's wandering brain and the words Bateman had quoted, almost the last words he had used, came back:—

"Smiling as he goes,
New mailed in armour, to the ancient sea."

CHAPTER TEN

SINCE those far-off days in Fowey, when Maurice Kennedy had written dainty love stories for the magazines (they are known in very literary circles as "tripe" or "bilge"), his outlook on life had altered. He had discovered that life is not a series of happy endings. Like many another boy who shuddered three years ago at the thought of death, he had come to look on the grim visitor familiarly. Men he liked, men in whom he had discovered queer little gifts, men of strange prejudices and stranger oaths, were killed within a few yards of him; he had felt their life blood warm on his hands, and it had been amazingly like any other warm liquid.

Once, in the stillness of a naked night, he had come on a terrible, dead man in No Man's Land. Kennedy was crouching in the dead man's shell-hole the while a German star shell faded. . . . In those ghastly seconds—death had leered at him. With time, however, even the frightful leer on the face of death had passed from his mind, but as the weeks went by, for all this familiarity with death, the memory of matted hair over the white, ravaged face of Max Bateman, persisted in him.

Leave came round again, and the apathy in his soul survived even the warm jollity of the leave train, even the ever welcome, unforgettable smell of London.

Veronica met him at Victoria.

He saw her standing under the clock, where she always waited. Her eyes sparkled as she greeted him, and her dear face was flushed with the warm tints of pleasure.

She knew what was wrong, for all her brave cheerfulness. She had feared it from his letters these last weeks.

Everywhere around them was the flushed, eager face of youth . . . youth with fourteen days of freedom in front of it—an eternity—determined to get the last ha'porth out of it.

Veronica did most of the talking during tea, for there was a despondency in Kennedy which she had never known before in him. She did it gamely, knowing instinctively that this was no temporary fit of the blues. As the evening went on, she drew on that mystic reserve of bravery which is stored in women's souls; and none but she knew of the cold touch at her heart.

Kennedy was delighted to find that she had seen poor little Fanny Bateman, as he had suggested in one of his letters.

"She's awfully cut up, Maurice," she said. "She loved him very much," she went on wistfully. "She's living with his sister now at some wonderful place in Leicestershire. She's . . . there's going to be a baby."

"I *say* . . ." said Kennedy. "I wonder if Max knew . . ."

Veronica nodded and for awhile they were silent.

He went to his people at Shere that night and she saw him off at Waterloo.

"I'm afraid you've found me dull, dear," he said.

For reply she pressed his hand. "I understand, old thing," she said quietly.

"He was almost my only friend," he went on.

"I know," she said. "Some men are like that."

The next day he went to Rearston, to Bateman's old home. He dreaded the visit very much, but he felt

bound to go and characteristically determined to get it over at once. He wired to Fanny, who met him at the station.

"It's good of you to come, Maurice," she said. "Let me introduce you. This is Miss Bateman, Max's sister."

They drove through the lanes of Max's boyhood to Max's old home, where the two women listened hungrily to the meager news he could give them. Neither woman cried, or indeed showed emotion of any kind.

Afterwards Fanny and Maurice walked up and down the lawn together.

"I've been through Max's papers," said Fanny. "I've put all his work, articles and so on, together, because I want you to go through them. There's ever so much poetry he had written, and I'm sure he would have preferred you to deal with it. I found this among his papers." She handed an envelope to him. It was inscribed in a writing he did not know. "To be delivered to Miss Tierney, 7 Melfort Mansions, Maida Vale, in the event of my death." Underneath the inscription was the signature of Ronald Bateman.

Kennedy had a feeling that he had been jerked back through the years.

"I went to that address," Fanny went on, "and they denied all knowledge of her. They were new people. The house agent didn't know anything either. What am I to do with it?"

"I knew her once," Kennedy said awkwardly. "I can probably find her. It's years ago now, and it's amazing to find her name turning up like this."

"Will you take it then?" Fanny asked. "It rather worried me. Obviously Ronald gave it to poor Max to deal with . . . I want you to tell me the truth, Maurice," she went on suddenly. "Did he die at once like you said? I want to *know* the truth." She spoke

with astounding calm for all the intensity in her words.

"What I said was true, Fanny. He must have died instantaneously."

"Thank God!" she said. "I've pictured him . . ."

"Yes, I know," he said. "Veronica told me she had seen you," he went on. "I'm more glad than I can say about . . . what she told me."

She said nothing but he saw that tears were in her eyes.

.

The two girls drove with him to the station when he returned to town, and it was about seven in the evening when he arrived. During the journey he had time to think over the odd chance which had brought a letter for Evie Tierney into his hands. He was very doubtful indeed if he could find her, but during dinner he glanced through the theater advertisements and saw there that the comedian with whom he had once seen her acting was at the Palladium. Thither he went and after some little delay learnt that the comedian was not due to appear until nine thirty. He returned at that hour and just before ten the comedian came into the dressing room where Maurice awaited him. He was still in his make-up, and though he had never spoken to Kennedy in his life before, he greeted him familiarly.

"I'm sorry to butt in like this," said Kennedy, after he had explained his presence, "But I once saw you acting with a lady called Evie Tierney. I wondered if you could give me her address. I've got a letter for her which was left by a man who's been killed."

A look of suspicion came into the comedian's face, and he watched Kennedy nervously.

"Have you this letter with you?" he asked. He was like a good-looking monkey, with kindly blue eyes.

"Yes. Here it is!"

The comedian read the inscription deliberately, holding the letter as if it were hot.

"She's not working now, you know," he said. "She's left the profession altogether."

"I didn't know. I've lost sight of her for years . . ."

"Oh, *you* know her then?" The words were instinct with suspicion.

"I did, years ago, before the war."

"Miss Tierney is now my wife," the comedian said, with an odd dignity. "That is why she is not on the boards still. I know all about her . . . all that I want to know. I've heard her speak of this Ronald Bateman. . . . Her past has nothing to do with me. Many of us have pasts which are best undisturbed, both men and women."

"I have the greatest respect for Miss Tierney . . . for your wife," Kennedy said.

"That's all right then," said the comedian. "Thank God, I'm not one of those who kick a woman because she's slipped down. There's enough in this blinking world to do the kicking stunt. Evie had a rotten time until she met me. She told me about things, about the little 'un. But that's all done with. The past's the past. . . . You'll understand why I don't exactly welcome this letter business, blowing in out of the past!" The seriousness, the uneasiness of the comedian, rendered his bizarre make-up the more absurd. He was still holding Ronald Bateman's letter.

"I'm sure you'll understand," the little comedian went on nervously. "The little chap is all that remains of the past, and I don't want memories stirred up. She's—though I say it that shouldn't—she's happy. Let sleeping dogs lie is my motto."

"You see, I didn't know," Kennedy commenced. "But what on earth am I to do with the letter?"

"Burn it. If this man who's dead was a decent chap he wouldn't want to come butting in out of her past, now she's happy. . . ."

Kennedy thought a moment, the while the comedian in his grotesque make-up stood holding the letter, and watching him anxiously.

"Perhaps you're right," Kennedy said thoughtfully. "The letter was confided to Bateman's brother, who is also killed."

The comedian struck a match and set fire to a corner of the envelope. He had some difficulty in persuading the fire to consume; the letter burned reluctantly, but at last it was done and all that was left was a little heap of ashes in the fireplace.

It struck one of the men at least that the act was symbolical.

"Well, thanks for looking me up," the comedian said. "Whatever her past, she's been a good wife to me, and that's all any man can expect . . . good-by."

As he turned into Regent Street Kennedy fell to wondering what the letter had contained. It might have been money, notes. Anyway, he was satisfied that he had acted for the best.

He was filled with an odd sense of relief to find that Evie had fallen on her feet, and he wondered how many of the comedian's great audience suspected the seriousness, the anxieties, behind the mask of folly which had made him famous. He remembered the comedian's reputation for improper gags . . . and wondered still more.

It was too late for him to get to Shere that night and he stayed in town. He decided to walk from the Palladium to Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street where he usually stayed. The streets were darker than of old, but that part of London at least was just as crowded, just as furtive, just as foul. Women flitted about like

moths as in the old days . . . they seemed even more numerous. He hurried along, but several of them spoke to him; tender words spoken with coarse voices followed him in the night. He remembered a talk he had had with a padre in France who had argued that the war was a purifying influence.

He altered his mind suddenly, and a prowling, accidental taxi took him to Anderton's. The long bright passage of the hotel was very welcome after the creeping pavements.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MOST of Maurice Kennedy's leave was spent in Shere. He wandered round the quiet sedative lanes, sometimes with his mother, sometimes alone. Once or twice he went to town to meet Veronica.

Mrs. Kennedy watched her son anxiously. She was distressed at the effect Max Bateman's death had had on him; notwithstanding that she knew him as few mothers know their sons, she had not imagined him capable of such feeling.

It was at her suggestion that Veronica came to stay with them, and on the night of her arrival Mrs. Kennedy went into her room ostensibly to see if her guest had everything she wanted. Veronica knew at once that the real reason was quite different and the two women who meant more to Kennedy than any other people in the world talked for nearly an hour about him.

Veronica and Kennedy wandered in the lanes and up on the open spaces where the wind swept fresh and free, through silent pinewoods into quiet old villages where was peace. The girl knew instinctively of the bitterness in the man who was with her, of his need and distress. Her sympathy would have gone out to the soldier in any case, but she knew perfectly well that Kennedy had become more clearly personal to her than he had ever been before.

On the Sunday Reggy and Gwendoline and two little Reggies—apparently he was inevitably wholesale—came down to Shere. Reggy had “made good”—the unhappy phrase was his own—and during lunch he produced many other equally Reggyish phrases, “men of substance” and the like.

He and his father, it transpired, had both made good.

He spoke of the methods unscrupulous rivals adopted to get questionable produce past the Government Inspector. Of course, he would not stoop to such methods . . . he was a man of substance . . . there was the reputation of the Firm, he said.

Kennedy looked steadily into his brother-in-law's eyes and wondered. Reggy knew that he wondered and his eyes dropped, and for awhile even the business man was silent for all his air of prosperity; and immaculate trousers.

Afterwards Gwen talked with her brother of Reggy. Her husband obsessed her; he was her world.

"He's so *shrewd*, you know, Maurice. His father told me that he absolutely *smells* any coming change in the market. He's a *natural* business man."

"All potatoes smell alike to me," said Kennedy, but was sorry at once for his rudeness. He turned his words away with a laugh.

"You were *never* fair to him, Maurice," Gwen complained. "*Everybody* can't be in the Army. Some must be left to run the business of the country, or we could never carry on at all."

"Of course, my dear," he said, but in his heart he was very bitter. Reggy because he bought potatoes, doubled the price (unless he was carefully watched) and then sold them to his country, was indispensable, a man of substance and would for years stand with his back to his fire and talk flatulently. He had the making of an ideal old man . . . and out in France was poor dead Bateman, who hated war and huckstering, whose soul had gone wandering off vaguely into the Unknown.

In the afternoon a tactful Mrs. Kennedy sent her son and Veronica for a walk. Veronica had to return to town very early on the following morning, and was extremely glad to get away from the family.

"Isn't he *the* Gadarene swine?" asked Kennedy.

"He hath his points," she said impersonally.

"I can't stand the man, he's insufferable," Kennedy persisted. "Making money, money, money out of the agony of better men, and filling his nasty little shrunken soul with ghoulish satisfaction."

"Yes, he is awful, but it isn't worth upsetting yourself, dear."

"I'm not upsetting myself," he said. "I suppose I am though," he added. "Whilst he was talking fatly, I could see poor Max's dead face. . . ."

"Now look here, Maurice. We've got two hours on our own. I don't want to argue. I don't want you to think of the War or anything horrid, like Reggy. Cut it all out! Let's just drift along these perfect lanes as if the old days were here again and there was no war, no war at all. I really want you to, to please me."

"Right-o!" he said, with forced cheerfulness. "I'm a beast to spoil your week-end like this."

"Don't be absurd. Look at that clump of copper beech, with the sun on it. And the hills beyond, blue with woods and distance. Isn't it simply gorgeous? Maurice boy, behind all this there is peace and quiet content in the world still."

"For Max?"

"I believe so . . ." she said quietly. "You do, as well . . ." she added, in a serious tone.

"I did . . . once," he said. "Most things I believed in . . . sort of tremble nowadays. Nothing is definite as it used to be. At least," he added, after a momentary hesitation, "scarcely anything."

She made no reply and in silence they walked on through a lane which went down steeply under trees of an intensely luminous green, which met overhead. The air was still, save for the monotone of the insects. A rabbit looked at them with owlish gravity before it

darted into the receptive hedge. At the bottom of the dip a couple of land-girls passed them, quaintly uniformed, and with curious glances at the silent pair—the officer and the smartly dressed London girl.

They mounted the other side, and at the top they found a stile, hidden from the road by a great oak which had lived through other wars than this, and would live, a gracious dignified tree.

"Dear old Veronica," he said, and then added musingly. "My mother once said that women were divided into two parts, one which strengthens a man and the other which weakens him."

"And which do you put me in, please?" she asked.

He smiled. "You're the most tonic girl I've ever known," he said. "You buck a man up more than all the doctors that ever were."

"That's very nice of you. I wonder which class Mrs. Kennedy would put me in?"

"She's very fond of you," he said indignantly.

"Yes, I know. She's almost the nicest woman I've ever known. She explains you a lot."

He leaned on the stile by her side and she rested her elbow on his shoulder and another silence came to them. It was the girl who broke it.

"It's funny, Maurice, how one's point of view alters, isn't it?"

He grunted acquiescingly, knowing of old that she had only half expressed her thought and would amplify it.

"I've always wanted to be an editor, ever since I came to London," she said.

"Well, you've achieved your ambition, dear. It's an ill wind, you know. . . ."

"That's simply beastly of you," she said.

"No, it isn't, dear," he said. "I've often thought that anyway it had done things for you, and been glad."

"It's done things for me," she said with an odd intonation. "But I've found out that what people have said about ambition is true!"

"And that is?" he asked.

"Oh . . . that when one has a thing its desirability goes."

"It's true . . . generally, I believe," he said.

"Well, now that I'm an editor, I really wonder why ever I wanted to be one. Power, after all, isn't really worth having. Happiness is all that matters."

"The old men have power," he said, grimly. "And youth—you and I—should have happiness. So long as youth was happy the old men were welcome to their power. But with their power they have wrecked both youth and happiness."

"Bother the old men . . . I'm talking about us . . ." she spoke sharply, determined not to let him get moody again.

Suddenly he looked at her and met her waiting eyes, which fell at once to the hand on her lap. His eye followed inevitably. It was her left hand, and on the third finger he saw the ring which once he had given her. It was the only ring on the hand and the opal gleamed up at him.

"Veronica!" he said, and she saw the grimness of his face soften as he spoke.

"I've been trying my damndest—as you would say—ever since we came into this lane, Maurice!" She uttered his name with a wild pleading.

"But . . ." he commenced and suddenly he took her in his arms. He felt her body lean towards him, kissed her waiting lips, felt her passionate answering kiss. Her eyes were closed; happiness was in his arms.

THE END

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